

gods and heroes of the ancient world

arlene allan



hermes

ROUTLEDGE

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

gods and heroes of the ancient world

arlene allan



hermes

ROUTLEDGE



HERMES

Hermes redresses the gap in modern English scholarship on this fascinating and complex god, presenting its readers with an introduction to Hermes' social, religious and political importance through discussions of his myths, iconography and worship. It also brings together in one place an integrated survey of his reception and interpretation in contemporaneous neighbouring cultures in antiquity as well as discussion of his reception in the post-classical periods up to the present day.

Arlene Allan is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Classics, University of Otago, New Zealand. Her research and teaching interests include Ancient Greek socio-religious history, Athenian drama and the interface between Graeco-Roman religion and early Christianity. She is co-author, with Ian C. Storey, of *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama* (2005, rev'd 2nd edn 2014) and sole author of several articles and book chapters in these subject areas.

Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World

Series editor: Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, London, UK

‘Uniformly excellent . . . The amount of information compactly conveyed is exceptional.’ (*Times Higher Education*)

‘Deacy is to be credited with developing the concept and format for an engaging and informative series.’ (*Bryn Mawr Classical Review*)

Routledge is pleased to present an exciting series, Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World. These figures from antiquity are embedded in our culture, many functioning as the source of creative inspiration for poets, novelists, artists, composers and filmmakers. Concerned with their multifaceted aspects within the world of ancient paganism and how and why these figures continue to fascinate, the books provide a route into understanding Greek and Roman polytheism in the 21st century.

These concise and comprehensive guides provide a thorough understanding of each figure, offering the latest in critical research from the leading scholars in the field in an accessible and approachable form, making them ideal for undergraduates in Classics and related disciplines.

Each volume includes illustrations, time charts, family trees and maps where appropriate.

Available:

Artemis

Stephanie Lynn Budin

Herakles

Emma Stafford

Aphrodite

Monica S. Cyrino

Apollo

Fritz Graf

Perseus

Daniel Ogden

Athena

Susan Deacy

Zeus

Ken Dowden

Prometheus

Carol Dougherty

Medea

Emma Griffiths

Dionysos

Richard Seaford

Oedipus

Lowell Edmunds

Ishtar

Louise Pryke

Achilles

Marta González González

Hermes

Arlene Allan

www.routledge.com/classicalstudies/series/GHAW



HERMES



Arlene Allan

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2018 Arlene Allan

The right of Arlene Allan to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-138-80570-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-351-01223-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Utopia
by Swales & Willis Ltd, Exeter, Devon, UK



CONTENTS

List of figures

Series foreword

Acknowledgements

List of ancient authors

List of abbreviations and conventions

Map of the Peloponnese and Isthmus of Corinth

Genealogical table

WHY HERMES?

INTRODUCING HERMES

KEY THEMES

- 1 TALENTS**
- 2 TRANSMISSIONS**
- 3 TRANSITIONS**
- 4 TRANSACTIONS**
- 5 TRANSPOSITIONS**
- 6 TRANSCENDENCE**
- 7 TRANSLATIONS**

HERMES AFTERWARDS

8 TRANSFORMATIONS I: OTHER MERCURYS

9 TRANSFORMATIONS II: FROM HIGH TO POPULAR CULTURE

Further reading

Bibliography

Index



FIGURES

Map: the Peloponnese and Isthmus of Corinth

Genealogical table: Hermes' family tree

- 0.1** Hermes and small altar, early fifth century BCE
- 0.2** Hermes with ram, relief from Ephesus, Turkey
- 1.1** 'Hermes Propylaios': Greek Herm c. 100 BCE in style of Alkamenes
- 1.2** 'Pan, Son of Hermes', second century BCE marble
- 2.1** 'Hermes, Zeus and Iris', Berlin painter, early fifth century BCE
- 3.1** 'The Judgement of Paris', Berlin painter, mid-fifth century BCE
- 4.1** 'Hermes and Silenos with lyre and kantharos', Berlin painter, early fifth century BCE
- 4.2** 'Hermes among hunters', Amasis painter, third quarter sixth century BCE, side B of black figure amphora, Inv. F 1688
- 4.3** 'Hermes with staff and money bag', bronze, fourth century BCE
- 5.1** 'Hermes killing the hundred-eyes Argos, guardian of Io', fifth century BCE
- 6.1** 'Hermes holding Dionysos'; marble copy of mid-fourth century BCE original
- 6.2** Depicting the psyche: author's drawing of detail from Attic white-ground lekythos attributed to the Achilles painter, c. 440 BCE
- 6.3** 'Hermes weighing the souls', Nikon painter, early fifth century BCE
- 6.4** 'The raising of Persephone', Persephone painter, 440 BCE
- 7.1** Raphael (1483–1520), 'Mercury offering Psyche the cup of

immortality', detail from the ceiling fresco of the Council of the Gods in the Loggia of Psyche, ca. 1517

- 7.2 Ibis-headed Thoth in Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, Thebes, ca. 1275 BCE
- 7.3 'Hermanubis', bronze miniature, c. first to second century ce
- 7.4 'Hermes with children in Elysium', fresco, third century ce, Rome
- 8.1 'Mercury leading Psyche to Olympus', Federico Maldarelli (1826–93)

p.viii

- 8.2 Alchemical illustration from *Atalante Fugitive*, Michel Maier, 1618
- 8.3 Detail of Hermes Trismegistos from marble pavement, 1488, designed by Giovanni de Stefano da Siena
- 9.1 Mercury (planet) with attributes, 1531 ce emblem
- 9.2 'The attributes of the arts and their rewards', Jean-Baptiste Chardin, 1766
- 9.3 'Mercury urging Aeneas to depart', Giambattista Tiepolo (1696–1770)
- 9.4 'The telephone. The music of the future (not after Wagner). Serenade to Mother Earth', 1877



SERIES FOREWORD

It is proper for a person who is beginning any serious discourse and task to begin first with the gods.

(Demosthenes, Epistula 1.1)

The gods and heroes of antiquity are part of our culture. Many function as sources of creative inspiration for poets, novelists, artists, composers and designers. Greek tragedy's ongoing appeal has ensured a continued familiarity with its protagonists. Even the world of management has used ancient gods as representatives of different styles: Zeus and the 'club' culture, for example, and Apollo and the 'role' culture: see C. Handy, *The Gods of Management: How They Work and Why They Will Fail* (Souvenir Press, 1978).

This series is concerned with how and why these figures continue to fascinate. But it has another aim too, namely to explore their strangeness. The familiarity of the subjects risks obscuring a vast difference between their modern and ancient meanings and purposes. With certain exceptions, people today do not worship them, yet to the peoples of the ancient world they were venerated as part of a pantheon made up of literally hundreds of divine powers. These range from major deities, each of whom might, themselves, be worshipped in specialised guises, to heroes – typically regarded as deceased individuals associated with local communities – to other, though overlapping, forms of beings such as daimones and nymphs. The landscape was dotted with sanctuaries, while natural features such as mountains, trees and rivers could be thought to be inhabited by religious beings. Studying these beings involves finding strategies to comprehend a world where everything could be, in the words of Thales, 'full of gods.'

To get to grips with this world, it is helpful to try to set aside modern

preconceptions of the divine, shaped as they are in large part by Christianised concepts of a transcendent, omnipotent, morally upright God. The ancients worshipped numerous beings who looked, behaved and suffered like humans, but who, as immortals, were not confined to the human condition. Far from being omnipotent, each had limited powers: even Zeus, the sovereign of the Greek pantheon, could be envisaged sharing control of the cosmos with his brothers Poseidon and Hades. Moreover, ancient polytheism was open to continual reinterpretation, with the result that we should not expect to find figures with a uniform essence. Accounts of the pantheon often begin with a list of major gods and some salient function: Hephaistos/Vulcan: craft; Aphrodite/Venus: love; Artemis/Diana: the hunt, and so forth. But few are this straightforward. Aphrodite, for example, is more than a goddess of love, key though that function is. She is, for instance, *hetaira* ('courtesan') and *porne* ('prostitute') but other epithets point to such guises as patronage of the community (*pandemos*: 'of all the people') and protection of seafaring (*euploia*, *pontia*, *limenia*).

p.x

Recognising this diversity, the series consists not of biographies of each god or hero – though such have been attempted in the past – but of investigations into their varied aspects within the complex systems of ancient polytheism. Its approach is shaped partly in response to two distinctive patterns in previous research.

In contrast, under the influence of the 'Paris School' of J.-P. Vernant and others, the second half of the twentieth century saw a shift away from research into particular gods and heroes towards an investigation of the system of which they formed part. This move was fuelled by a conviction that the study of isolated deities could not do justice to the dynamics of ancient religion. Instead, the pantheon came to be envisaged as a logical and coherent network whose various powers were systematically opposed to one another. In a classic study, for example, Vernant argued that the Greek concept of space was consecrated through an opposition between Hestia (the hearth – fixed space) and Hermes (the messenger and traveller – moveable space): *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 127–75. The gods as individual entities were far from neglected, however, as may be exemplified by the studies by Vernant and his colleague M. Detienne on specific deities including Artemis, Dionysos and Apollo: for example, Detienne's *Apollon, le couteau en main: une approche expérimentale du polythéisme grec* (Gallimard, 1998). Since the first volumes of *Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World* were published in 2005, the series has been marking out a middle ground between the

positions just outlined. While approaching its subjects as unique, if varied, individual entities, the authors pay attention to gods and heroes as powers within a network of religious beings.

In the earlier years, most of the volumes were on classical topics – and within this, they dealt chiefly with ancient Greek subjects, particularly Greek deities. Now into its second decade, the series continues to deal with gods – and we are expanding our definition of what a ‘god’ denotes to include collectivities such as the Muses. We are also beginning to include a greater range of ‘heroes’ including Achilles and Theseus. Roman subjects will be explored too, starting with Diana. But in the biggest development since the series began, we are now expanding what we mean by the ‘ancient world’ with the inclusion of Near Eastern topics such as Ishtar.

Each volume presents an authoritative, accessible and fresh account of its subject via three main sections. The introduction brings out what merits particular attention about the figure in question. This is followed by a central section which explores key themes including – to varying degrees – origins, myth, cult and representations in literature and art. Since the series was launched, post-classical reception has increasingly moved into the mainstream of classical research and teaching. This confirms my thinking about the importance of a final, third section exploring the ‘afterlife’ of each subject. Each volume includes illustrations pertinent to each subject and, where appropriate, time charts, genealogical tables and maps. An annotated bibliography points the reader towards further scholarship.

p.xi

For convenience – though with reservations – we adopted the masculine terms ‘gods’ and ‘heroes’ for the series title – although as the Greek *theos* (‘god’) could be used of goddesses too, this choice does partly reflect ancient usage. I have always suggested that authors might opt for bc/ad rather than bce/ce as standard practice in Classics and to bring consistency to the series – however, I have never strictly insisted on this. We have gone for Greek spellings of ancient Greek names except for famous Latinised exceptions.

Catherine Bousfield, the editorial assistant until 2004, literally dreamt about the series one night in the early 2000s. Her thoroughness and motivation brought it close to its launch. The former Classics editor at Routledge, Richard Stoneman, provided his expertise and support as the series moved through the early stages of commissioning and working with

authors. I then had the honour of working with his successor Matt Gibbons during the early years of the series. Amy Davis-Poynter and Elizabeth Risch have been wonderful colleagues in recent years.

Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, 2017



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Susan Deacy as series editor, who invited me to undertake this project on Hermes, and Elizabeth Risch as editorial assistant, for their patience and understanding in response to the several events which worked to delay completion of this study. Susan's comments were most helpful in getting the chapters to their current state. I would also like to thank the University of Otago for a period of research leave in 2015 during which I was able to make significant progress on portions of the manuscript and for the funding (on two separate occasions) to acquire a research assistant, first Gordon Turner and then Chloe Bray, whose work afforded me the time to focus on other matters pertaining to completion of this study. A debt of gratitude is also owed to our wonderful library staff at Otago, especially those in the loans and acquisitions department, for sourcing materials and dealing with multiple interlibrary loan requests on almost a weekly basis in the earlier stages of this project. I am also indebted to my colleagues in the Department of Classics for their patience over the past four years during which they have listened to and commented on papers dealing primarily with Hermes at our Classics Research Seminars, and especially to Gwynnaeth McIntyre for her comments on the last three chapters. A special note of thanks must also go to Liz Kurtulik Mercuri – one senses a certain 'Mercurial' coincidence at work here – in the Permissions Department at Art Resource for her patient assistance in acquiring the images selected for this book.

My engagement with Hermes began further back in time, when I undertook my first serious investigation of this god in Greek tragedy for an MA under the supervision of Ian C. Storey: it is to him that I owe my deepest gratitude. Similarly, I wish to thank Richard Seaford who oversaw my continuing study of Hermes outside of tragedy for my PhD. Insights gained from each of these studies have been foundational in the

presentation of the god contained herein.

Finally, I would be remiss not to express my heartfelt appreciation of my friends and fellow journeyers at DCBC, who have encouraged and supported me through both the pleasurable and the more challenging times from the very beginning.

σας εὐχαριστώ όλους
Arlene Allan, 2017



ANCIENT AUTHORS

While epic authors such as Homer and Virgil, playwrights such as Euripides and Plautus, and philosophers such as Plato and Seneca are generally well known, many less familiar authors often make comments about Hermes that are of interest to this study. Listed here are the names of these less frequently encountered authors set out in chronological order along with their primary genre of writing. The majority of their writings can be found in volumes of the Loeb Classical Library.

<i>Greek authors</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Genre</i>
Hipponax	Sixth century BCE	Iambic poetry (invective)
Pherekydes	Sixth century BCE	Poetry
Theophrastos	Fourth to third century BCE	Philosophy
Callimachus	Third century BCE	Poetry
Lycophron	Third century BCE	Poetry
Aelian	Second to third century BCE	Natural history and rhetoric
Theokritos	Second to third century BCE	Bucolic poetry
Parthenios	First century BCE	Romance/mythography
Diodorus Siculus	First century BCE	History
Antonius Liberalis	Second century CE	Mythography
Philostratus	Second century CE	Biography
Athenaeus	Third century CE	Rhetoric
Philostratus the Elder	Third century CE	Rhetoric
Nonnos	Fifth century CE	Epic
Tryphiodoris	Fifth century CE	Epic
<i>Latin authors</i>		
Ennius	Third to second century BCE	Poetry
Propertius	First century BCE	Elegy
Valerius Flaccus	First century CE	Epic
Statius	First century CE	Epic and poetry
Hyginus	Second century CE	Mythography
Servius	Fifth century CE	Commentary



ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTIONS

A significant amount of our evidence for the ancient gods is derived from a variety of literary forms in the original languages, including inscriptions. Where individual literary works are the subject of discussion, the ancient author's name and the title of the work is provided in full in the body of the text. References to inscriptions will contain the standard abbreviation of the catalogue in which they are found followed by their catalogue number. References to modern authors will be given in the form of author surname and date. For artistic productions, the artist's name will be given (if known) as well as other details such as its production date, material and style and museum.

CIL FG rH

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum,
1863– Jacoby, F. (ed., 1923–58) *Die*
Fragmente der Griechischen
Historiker, Leiden

Until recently, this was the 'go-to' collection for anyone interested in consulting ancient Greek historical inscriptions; however, since 2006, an online version complete with English translations of each inscription, a commentary and references for further reading has been made available to those libraries who purchase a site licence.

FHG

Fragmenta Historicum Graecum, C.
Müller (ed.), 1841–70

IC

Guarducci, M. (ed., 1935–50)

IG

Inscriptiones Creticae, 4 Vols. Roma
Inscriptiones Graecae 1873–

LIMC

Lexicon Iconographicum
Mythologiae Classicae, 1981–99,
Zurich and Munich

<i>LSAM</i>	Sololowski, F. (ed., 1955) <i>Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure</i> , Paris
<i>LSCG</i>	Sololowski, F. (ed., 1969) <i>Lois sacrées des cites grecques</i> , Paris
<i>LSS</i>	Sololowski, F. (ed., 1962) <i>Lois sacrées des cites grecques: Supplément</i> , Paris
<i>PGM</i>	Preisendanz, K. et al. (eds., 1932) <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> , 2 Vols. 2nd ed.
<i>RE</i>	A. Pauly, G. Wissowa and W. Kroll (eds., 1893–) <i>Real-Encyclopädie d. klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , Munchen
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i> (1923–) Leiden
<i>SIG</i>	von Gaertringen, F. (ed., 1960) <i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum</i> , 4 Vols. Hildesheim

SPELLING OF GREEK NAMES

In most instances, a distinction is maintained between the Latin and Greek spelling of proper names and titles relevant to the material under discussion: Greek spellings will be used for authors writing in Greek; Latin for authors writing in Latin. This involves retaining Greek ‘ai’ for Latin ‘ae’, Greek ‘k’ for Latin ‘c’ and Greek ‘os’ for Latin ‘us’. Thus:

<i>Greek</i>	<i>Latin</i>
Kerberos	Cerberus
Moirai	Moirae
Phaidra	Phaedra

p.xv

It also entails the retention of Greek names where they differ significantly from the later Latin equivalent. Thus:

<i>Greek</i>	<i>Latin</i>
Herakles	Hercules
Hermes	Mercury
Zeus	Jupiter
Hera	Juno

Modern authors referred to in this text are by last name only; an exception is made for authors whose last name and publication date are the same: in that case the initial of the first name is provided. All authors mentioned in the notes and text-body can be found in the Bibliography following the 'Further reading' section.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.



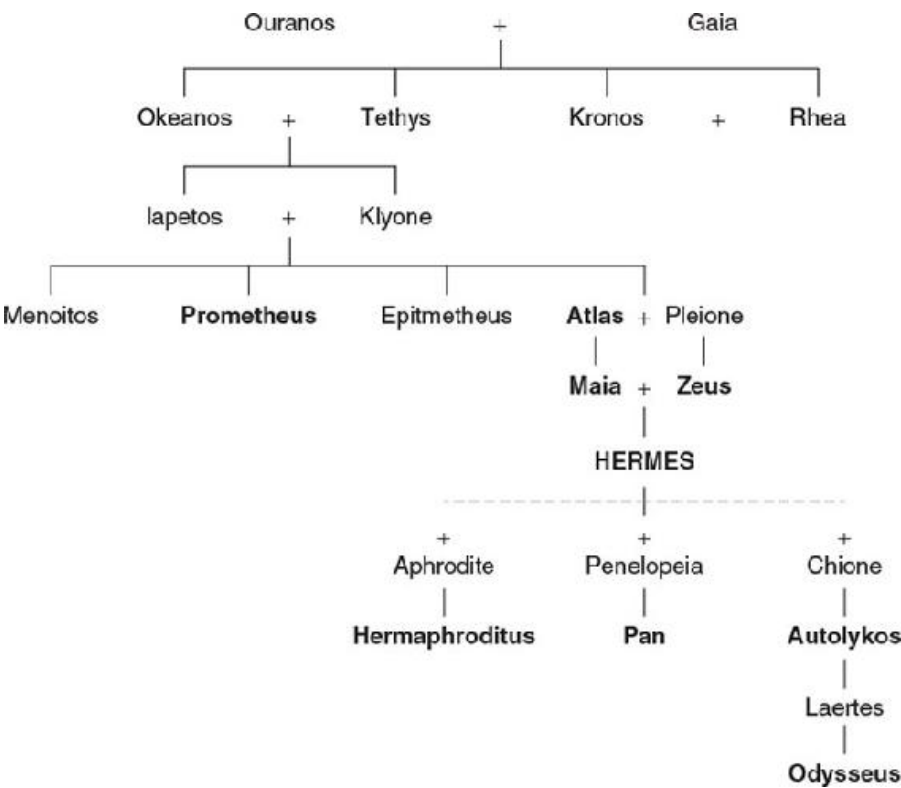
THE PELOPONNESE AND ISTHMUS OF CORINTH





GENEALOGICAL TABLE

Hermes' family tree





WHY HERMES?

Hermes is a fascinating god that seems to deny succinct definition. It is possible to identify many if not most of his activities, but to name him ‘the god of X’ is to leave out far too many other roles that he plays within his Olympian family and ancient Greek society. So, for instance, many people are familiar with Hermes as the divine messenger of the Olympian pantheon. Serving as official herald to his father Zeus, Hermes delivers verbatim the express will of the pantheon’s chief god to those who are to act upon it, both mortal and immortal. Because of this, we might think him a rather simple god, one of seemingly secondary importance in comparison with other Olympians, such as Apollo, who reveals the future to mortals, or Demeter, goddess of grain. But in thinking this, we are mistaken.

The evidence suggests that by the end of the fifth century BCE, Hermes had acquired so many cult names and activities that the Athenian comic playwright, Aristophanes, could confidently raise a laugh by developing a whole scene around his versatility: in his play *Wealth* (388 bc), when the Olympians have been displaced from rulership by the god Wealth, Hermes comes visiting in an attempt to win for himself a place of honour in the new regime. After offering his services under the cult-titles of *Strophaios* (‘Hinge-Turner’), *Empolaios* (‘Dealer’), *Dolios* (‘Crafty One’), *Hegemonios* (‘Leader’) and *Enagonios* (‘President of Contests’), his interlocutor is forced to comment, ‘How useful it is to have so many names!’ (*Wealth* 1164).

The number and variety of his associations are astounding. He is a precocious, divine child, born of secrecy, companion to dark night; a stealthy thief, a playful prankster and mischief-maker, yet called by Homer ‘the friendliest of gods to men’ or, alternately translated, ‘the one who most enjoys the company of men’ (σοὶ γὰρ τε μάλιστα γὰρ φίλτατόν

ἔστιν / ἄνδρϊ ἑταιρίσσαι, *Iliad* 24.334-5). An innovative craftsman, a pastoralist, a trader, a trafficker, a master manipulator of both words and material objects; the swift one, the luck-bringer, the leader of dreams, the rememberer: elusive, evasive, yet eloquent; antagonist and conciliator, purposely begotten by Zeus to complete his cosmos. All these and more are characteristics and activities of the god worshipped under the *theonym* (god-name) Hermes.

Like the Greeks, the Romans saw the need to venerate this god and adopted him into their divine pantheon under the name Mercury; however, for the Romans, who reduced his activities to a more manageable level, he was a far less versatile god. Nevertheless, knowledge of Hermes' other activities remained alive through the retelling and reworking of the stories once told by the Greeks. And, like the Romans, because many of these stories still appeal to us today, they continue to be reproduced in a variety of media: Mercury (aka Hermes) can be found in comic books, cartoons, product advertisements and television commercials, movies initially made for the big and little screens, novels and theatrical productions. In other words, the idea of Hermes lives on through these re-imaginings of the god in ways that recall, enhance and sometimes even alter his ancient characteristics to suit our modern sensibilities. However, our image of Hermes did not come to us directly from either the Greeks or the Romans: how we visualise the god today has been influenced greatly by his representation in medieval and Renaissance art and literature.

p.2

Despite the continuing appeal of Hermes, unlike some of his Olympian siblings, such as Dionysos and Athena who have generated a great deal of interest in recent years, Hermes has been relatively neglected. There has not been a book-length study of him produced in English since Brown's (1947, reprinted in 1969) *Hermes the Thief*, but that study is focused solely on the ancient Greek god.¹ By contrast, in this study, in addition to a reassessment of Hermes' place in the ancient Greek world in a manner not undertaken by any previous consideration of the god, readers will find gathered together in a single collection an overview of his reception by cultures outside of Greece and ancient Rome from Hellenistic times down to the present day. Our study begins with a fuller introduction to Hermes and the challenges faced in coming to understand him. It is followed by a set of interrelated chapters that are based on the epithets (poetic and cult adjectives), iconography, descriptions of and stories about Hermes in relation to six significant aspects of his divinity: Talents ([Chapter 1](#)), Transmissions ([Chapter 2](#)), Transitions ([Chapter 3](#)), Transactions

(Chapter 4), Transpositions (Chapter 5) and Transcendence (Chapter 6). Then follows a chapter entitled Translations (Chapter 7) on Hermes' reception in Rome and his possible similarities to certain gods in the pantheons of cultures east of Greece and west of Rome. Completing this study, in *Hermes Afterwards*, are two chapters, the first of which (Chapter 8) considers what becomes of Hermes between roughly 300 BCE and the end of the Renaissance. In the second (Chapter 9), the focus turns to more modern receptions of him from the Renaissance up until the present day.

NOTE

- 1 The majority of book-length studies on Hermes were written in the early to mid-1900s and, along with the two more recent works on the god (Zanker 1965; Kahn 1978), remain untranslated from their original languages. This includes the most recent dedicated study of the god by Dominique Jaillard (2007a) in French. Anyone interested in reading about Hermes can find a section on him by consulting any book on the Greek gods (e.g., Otto 1954) or more general studies on Greek religion (e.g., Burkert 1985), but often these earlier studies use approaches that have been challenged or, alternately, they appear in the context of a study with an entirely different focus, such as those devoted to the Homeric hymns (e.g., Sowa 1984; Clay 1989), the Jungian trickster archetype (e.g., Kerényi 1996; Hyde 1999), ancient cults (e.g., Johnston 1999; Larson 2007) or a particular geographic area (e.g., Jost 1985). Additionally, numerous articles and book chapters on Hermes were written in the last half of the twentieth century; these and the authors noted above can be found in this book's Bibliography.



INTRODUCING HERMES

I would like to begin our introduction to Hermes with a story that may not seem directly relevant to a study of this god. It is a tale told by Hesiod in his *Theogony* (535–57) about another divine being and his falling out with Zeus and the other soon-to-be Olympians at a time when men would come together in communion with the gods. At this point it is not wholly clear whether past practice has entailed a distribution of parts of the animal between gods and mortals, or the total destruction of the animal in the fire as an offering to the gods. However, Hesiod says that Prometheus, the son of a Titan of the previous generation of gods, and a contemporary of the six Olympian siblings, desired to ‘match wits’ (534) with Zeus, and so when next mortals gathered together with the gods for their meeting, he divided up the slaughtered animals in the following way: he wrapped the edible, most nutritious pieces of flesh together with the entrails in the unappetising stomach of the ox, and the inedible bones in glistening, fragrant and flavourful fat. He then presented these two portions to Zeus and asked him to choose which the gods would take and which would fall to mortals.¹

This account goes on to say that Zeus feigned ignorance, even though he understood the trick, and chose the portion most appealing to the eye: the bones wrapped with fat. Thereafter, reacting angrily, as if he had been deceived, Zeus thenceforth hid from men the fire they required to render their portion edible, which then led Prometheus to steal a spark of the divine fire from the gods on their behalf. Not only did Prometheus’ intervention cause a falling-out between himself and Zeus; more significantly, it caused a breach between mortals and the gods. Hesiod does not provide details; he merely ends his account with the observation that ‘from this (event), to the deathless ones the tribes of men upon the earth burn white bones upon fragrantly smoking altars’ (556–7). Thus, although mortals include the gods in this way whenever they sit down to

eat freshly cooked meat, the very practice commemorates the end of the coming together of mortals and gods in more intimate fellowship over an open fire and a good meal.

With the lines of direct communion (and communication) between mortals and gods seriously damaged (if not wholly broken), a question arises: if Zeus himself and the rest of the gods will no longer engage with mortals face-to-face, can this newly created breach between them be bridged? How? By whom? Zeus, of course, knows what must be done and he spends a good deal of time making sure that it happens. That, at least, is what the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* invites us to understand when it sings of this god's coming into the world and his making of his way to Olympos to become Zeus' official herald, and envoy to Hades (among many other things; see [Chapter 3](#)). Herein, then, lies part of the answer to a slightly different slant on our opening question, 'Why Hermes?' The rest is not quite so simply or easily told, but it is well worth the telling nonetheless.

p.4

The first problem anyone encounters when trying to understand this god is directly attributable to the very diversity of his activities. They are so varied that modern scholars have been unable to reach a consensus as to what quality or concept holds them all together, some even arguing that there is no such unifying feature to be found. The closest we can come to identifying any 'core' to Hermes, according to Parker, is to group his activities into a triad associated with 'transition / communication / exchange' (2005: 391). It may well be the case, again as noted by Parker, that the diversity of Hermes' activities arises 'not on the basis of the internal logic of a central core' but rather from what he terms 'the principle . . . of "one thing leads to another"'. So, for example, because the cavalry happened to assemble in a part of Athens where a number of Hermes' iconic cult statues were set up, Hermes was granted the title of *Hegemonios* ('Leader'), becoming the patron-god of Athens' cavalry commanders. It would seem that proximity to an established place of Hermes' worship was the factor that initiated the principle 'one thing leads to another' (Parker 2005: 392). No other city, as far as we know, adopted this cult title for this god. And Athens was not the only place where this occurred: evidence does exist from a number of sites which show that many of Hermes' offices and titles were localised, being found in one place, but in no others.

This tendency to develop highly localised titles was not unique to Hermes. Many of the gods in the Greek pantheon exhibit this titular

diversity. Yet the Greeks were able to accept that these different appellations were all manifestations of the same deity. Because they understood their world in very different terms than we do our own, they perceived relationships that are quite foreign to our twenty-first-century experience of 'reality'. In the case of Hermes, where there is the tendency to see apparently illogical and even contradictory characteristics and activities, the Greeks acknowledged a unitary god, whose interaction with humanity made sense to them in terms of the need(s) they believed him to fulfil within the government of the cosmos. If we were able to identify the need(s) Hermes' activities address, we would be better able to provide an answer to the question, 'Why Hermes?' both in terms of the ancient Greeks' veneration of this god, and of his continuing appeal to the modern imagination. To do so, it is necessary first to consider the different types of evidence upon which any inquiry into this god must be based. There is one problem, however, of which we need to be aware: many of the details about Hermes' character or activities come from a single author, who is writing well outside of the Greek archaic and classical periods on which it is preferable to base our understanding of the ancient Greek ideas about the god. For instance, Ovid makes the earliest reference to Hermes' involvement in the Battle against the Giants (*Gigantomachy*). Being late, we cannot be sure whether the detail is a relatively new addition to his persona and duties rather than one for which no earlier source has survived. Because of this, in this study of Hermes' various titles and roles within the Greek pantheon, use will be made of a later source only if the information provided accords with our earlier evidence. Otherwise, these later authors will be considered as providing information on changes to the understanding of Hermes in keeping with the shifting view of the gods through time.²

p.5

ORIGINS AND NAME

Evidence suggests that Hermes was among the oldest of the gods in the Greek pantheon, as he first appears as the recipient of offerings in several inscribed tablets found at three sites from the late Bronze Age. These three sites are spread across the Mycenaean Greek territories – one in the Peloponnese (Pylos), one on the mainland (Thebes) and one on the island of Crete (Knossos) – indicating that at least by the end of the Mycenaean period (ca. 1100 bc), the god had obtained widespread acceptance. Despite this distribution, we cannot be sure that Hermes was in origin a Greek god. Based primarily on what modern scholars have taken to be a lack of connection between the god's name and the earliest known

representation of him, it is entirely possible that he was originally a god worshipped by the indigenous inhabitants of the areas into which the peoples we know as the Greeks came, and subsequently adopted by the Greeks into their own pantheon. If this were the case, two possible reasons for his adoption may be posited. The first would hold that the incoming Greeks recognised something in this unfamiliar god that addressed a need not met already by one of their own; this could occur if the living conditions they found in Greece were different to those of the place from which they had come. The second possibility would be that this god was too deeply rooted and important to the indigenous peoples to be wholly subsumed under the name of one of the newcomers' gods. What this god symbolised for either an indigenous population or the early Greeks cannot be determined with certainty: the best scholars can do is to speculate on the basis of the surviving evidence. As Herter (1976: 198–9) states,

Whether Hermes originated from pre-Greek times and later had a Greek name, or came into the country of the Greeks or developed from them only in the new homeland, does not need to concern us here; a precise chronology of his origins . . . would not be decisive for the knowledge of his true essence.

The only information gained about Hermes from the tablets is that he was honoured in company with three goddesses who have been identified as the early equivalents of Hera, Aphrodite and, possibly, an Athena- or Artemis-like deity.³

Another approach through which attempts have been made to determine Hermes' origins is that of etymology. Once it was discovered that the Greek language was a member of a much larger family of languages, all developing from a very ancient tongue, named by modern scholars Proto-Indo-European (the hypothetical parent language), the names of several gods from different language-groups were found to be related. Unfortunately, in Hermes' case, such attempts have yielded mixed results. Unlike some of his fellow gods in the pantheon, Hermes' name cannot be definitively derived from an identifiable Proto-Indo-European stem; similarly, there is no other god within the ancient pantheons of the various language-groups devolved from the parent language which can be linked etymologically with Hermes. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the perfectly Greek term from which it seems Hermes took his name is '*herm*' (alternatively, '*herma*'), a term which is used in Homer and later authors to indicate something used as a 'stay', 'prop', 'support' or 'foundation'. For instance, in the *Iliad* (1.486) the Greeks place large props under their ship to keep it from rolling over on its side when beached. If this is the base meaning of Hermes' name, we might expect there to be a more obvious correlation between that meaning and the god's various

activities in the Greek pantheon, but that is not how the relationship has been interpreted; although the derivation of his name from *herma* has become the most widely accepted of all explanations, Hermes' place and functions within the Greek pantheon have been interpreted through the significance of stone-mounds in Greek culture rather than through any possible correlation between the root meaning of *herma* and the god's activities.⁴

p.6

If the origins and significance of the name 'Hermes' remain uncertain, other important aspects of the god's naming speak more clearly. These are his poetic epithets and his cult *epikleses*, those adjectives attached to a god's name that give expression to particular qualities, activities or characteristics with which he is associated. As the comment Aristophanes makes in his last extant comedy, *Wealth*, indicates, Hermes was recognised as having an especially large number of these *epikletic* 'names'. Some of them, such as *Kyllenios* and *Coryciotes*, are geographical, linking the god with a particular place. A few, such as *Imbramos*, are genealogical, linking Hermes with a particularly important ancestor, usually of an ancient royal family line. In such case, the name-use remains quite localised, and reveals little about the god except that he was especially venerated in a specific area or by an important family. Still others become standard poetic descriptors of Hermes: the phrase 'son of Maia' (*Maiados huios*) belongs solely to Hermes as he is Maia's only reported offspring. Similarly, although all the gods of Olympus have staves, often of gold, Hermes is called *Chrysorrhapis*, 'Of the Golden Wand', because of the unique importance of this staff to Hermes' activities. In addition, Hermes shared several poetic epithets of a generic nature with the other gods, which included adjectives such as 'glorious', 'most glorious', 'splendid' and 'strong', purely by virtue of his being divine and therefore superior to mortals.⁵

Other epithets and *epikleses* are more revealing, as they are expressive not only of the god's activities or qualities, but also of the human perception of them. The majority of these are found in the stories and sacred tales associated with particular cults involving Hermes, some recurring with greater frequency than others, indicating that they were well known and widely accepted descriptors of the god. Those referring to his activities include titles such as *Agoraios* ('Of the Agora') and *Epimēlios* ('Keeper of Flocks'), while those reflective of a human assessment of the god's intervention can be loosely divided into positive and negative categories. Epithets such as *Dôter Eaôn* ('Giver of Good') and *Eriounēs* ('Swift Runner' or 'Beneficent') denote a highly favourable view of his

interaction with mortals, while *Klepsiphrôn* ('Dissembler') and *Mêchaniôtes* ('Mechanic', 'Trickster') point to qualities and activities which tend to be viewed unfavourably because they imply an unanticipated negative outcome from his intervention. Though far fewer in number than the positive epithets, those with negative connotations all speak to humans' inability to correctly assess the long-term results of Hermes' intervention.

p.7

There are two other poetic epithets reserved solely to refer to Hermes; in fact, they are so closely associated with him that they can be used independently (that is, without his theonym) to identify him in the hexameter poetry of Homer, Hesiod and the *Hymns*. Both of them appear to be very old and have generated a significant amount of discussion as to their meaning. The first, *Argeiphontes*, was thought to mean 'Slayer of Argus' or 'Slayer in Argos' in reference to Hermes' killing of a herdsman/watchman of cows (or one cow in particular) on behalf of Zeus. The second is *Diaktoros*. Sound arguments have been made for the term having the semantic sense of 'Guide'; other very plausible arguments have been set out demonstrating that it may simply mean 'Servant', and still others argue that 'Messenger' is its primary sense. In this case, the activities in which Hermes is involved make each of these proffered meanings possible. These are but a few of his many epithets and *epikleses* which will be explored more closely in the 'Key Themes' chapters pertaining to this god.⁶

IMAGE

In addition to his epithets and *epikleses*, there is another source of information about Hermes in the various artistic representations of this deity. The connection of Hermes' name with piles of stones gains some support from these representations of the god from the late archaic period onward, which frequently depict him as a wooden post, occasionally ithyphallic, held in place by a pile of stones. In the late sixth century at Athens, Hipparchos, son of the tyrant Pisistratos, is credited with introducing a carved stone form of Hermes which, Herodotos tells us (2.51), he borrowed from the Samothracian mystery religion of the Pelasgians (the quasi-mythical 'first peoples' of mainland Greece). This form, called a *herma* (or in English more often a *herm*), rapidly became the iconic representation of the god, not only at Athens but throughout the Greek world. It consisted of a quadrangular stone pillar surmounted by an anthropomorphic head, usually mature and bearded, below which,

midway down the front of the pillar, was another anthropomorphic feature: an erect male member (see [Figure 0.1](#)).

By appealing to the Pelasgians as the source behind his image, the ithyphallic nature of the god is given great antiquity; however, the antiquity of Hermes' relationship to phallicism and its significance, once taken for granted, is now in dispute, as there is no evidence for this element in his iconography prior to the late sixth century.⁷

When Hipparchos introduced this new image of Hermes to Athens, he had these Herms set up at the midway points between the Attic *demes* (urban and suburban communities) and the Altar of the Twelve Gods located in the Athenian *agora* ('place of assembly,' often the 'market-place'). Each was inscribed with three pieces of information: the distance to the Altar; the name of the Hipparchos (as dedicator); and a moralising maxim, such as 'Deceive not a friend.' In what we would equate to the shoulder area of the pillar, stubby wooden posts protruded on either side, apparently placed there to receive dedications of wreaths and other such offerings from passers-by, or perhaps, as some have argued, to hold up garments which could be offered to the god as well. Often, on one side of the pillar, below the wooden stub, what has come to be described as a herald's wand (*kerykion*; Latin: *caduceus*) would be incised, clearly indicating that Hermes was the god represented by the Herm.⁸



Figure 0.1 Hermes and small altar, early fifth century BCE

Louvre, Paris, France; Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

The placement of the *kerykion* on these Herms was inspired by stories about the god and taken up from representations of him in ceramic ware. The distinctive wand, which bears what appear to be two snakes curving around the staff to create an unclosed figure-eight, became one of the iconographic attributes of the god in the plastic arts. It served as his staff

of authority which we find already being carried by the god in Homer's *Odyssey*, where the narrator says that '[Hermes] took in hand the rod, the one which hypnotises the eyes of men, as he wishes, or awakens them again from sleeping' (5.47–8). Another equally common attribute was Hermes' golden sandals (*pedila*), which gave him such speed in flight, often represented by small stylised wings on or near the god's ankles. These too were an attribute which appears in each of Homer's epics, indicating that both the *kerykion* and the detachable wings were integral to Hermes' identity when serving as Zeus' official herald. We see these being put on in the same book of the *Odyssey* (5.44–6) when Hermes responds to Zeus' instructions to take a message to Kalypso: 'And straightaway, under his feet he bound the beautiful sandals / immortal, golden, which bore him over both the waters and the boundless earth as on a blast of wind.' Alongside the *kerykion*, Hermes' winged sandals become an integral element in the representations of the god in both written and pictorial accounts right through until modern times. For instance, so much a part of his iconography were the winged sandals that Apuleius, a second-century ce Latin author, makes specific mention of them as part of an actor's costume who is playing Hermes in a play (*Metamorphoses*, more commonly known by its alternate title in English, *The Golden Ass*, 10.30–1). Even Nonnos, a fifth-century ce Greek author, had to mention them in his epic-like tale, the *Dionysiaca* (e.g., 3.373–4). These wings could also be added to his broad-rimmed traveller's cap (*petasos*), or to a leather cap or helmet (thought by many to be a representation of the 'cap of invisibility'), either replacing the ankle-wings or in addition to them. Another item of clothing, the *chalmys* or 'cloak', also associated with travellers, became a further iconographic attribute of the god, as did the traveller's purse or money-bag carried in the god's hand.⁹

p.9

In the earliest depictions of Hermes, he appears as an older, bearded male, often at the head of a group of figures who are shown following him. But by the late sixth century, in both vase decorations and anthropomorphic sculpture, he begins to lose his beard and becomes much younger in appearance, often crowned with a forehead covered in short curly locks and long wavy hair. This youthful Hermes eventually becomes the norm in both the graphic and sculptural arts: and yet, despite this trend, the older, bearded head remains the dominant image of the god at the top of his iconic pillars.¹⁰

Thus, by the end of the sixth century, there are two contemporaneous ways of representing the god. One depicts a youthful figure on the move,

who is capable of extreme speed (indicated by the wings on or near his ankles) and who is often on a mission (indicated by his *kerykion*), sometimes moving so quickly that he passes without notice (as may be indicated by the winged cap); the other, an immobilised, older figure (being both limbless and wingless) who, nevertheless, is full of vitality (indicated by his ithyphallic protuberance). This more mature Hermes is also on assignment, for he too has his *kerykion*; however, this Hermes stands his ground and awaits the arrival of humans in order to confront them in the fulfilment of his mission. The youthful Hermes appears most often on pottery in scenes drawn from long-told stories; the mature Hermes, in scenes depicting his cult worship. But the distinction is not consistently maintained, for the tales in which Hermes played a role were often inextricably linked with his worship. Both figural types were equally valid forms for expressing the ways in which it was believed that Hermes related to humanity in fulfilling his roles in the cosmos.

p.10

MYTH

The majority of Hermes' iconic attributes can be found in the stories told about him, and as with all of the gods, Homer and Hesiod are our earliest sources of information for Hermes as well. These two poets were also extremely important for the Greeks, for it is the fifth-century historian, Herodotus, addressing an audience of Greek contemporaries, who tells us that 'Homer and Hesiod . . . were the ones who created the gods' family trees for the Greek world, gave them their names, assigned them their honours and areas of expertise, and told us what they looked like' (*History* 2.53.2). It is now generally accepted that both of these poets were composing near the end of what we now call the 'oral tradition'; that is, they were working with material much older than themselves, which had been passed down by word-of-mouth for generations. The Greeks of late archaic and classical times accepted that both of them were active several generations before their own time, and that both were speakers of truth because they received divine assistance from the Muses.

In Homer's *Iliad*, Hermes is mentioned on six occasions. The final book in this epic poem, Book 24, contains the two longest scenes in which he is a character directly involved in the action (vv. 331–468, 677–94), in addition to several earlier references to him by others in the same book (vv. 22–4, 153–5, 181–3). He appears as an active character in only one other scene (21.497–502) where he is in a confrontation with Apollo's mother, Leto, as the gods on either side of the Trojan War are about to

come to blows with each other. Apart from these two direct appearances, Hermes is referred to on four other occasions, either in a description of his activity at some time in the distant past (2.104–5, 5.388–90) or in a comment on his relationship to the warrior who is the subject of the narrative (14.490–1, 16.181–7). In Homer's companion epic, the *Odyssey*, Hermes again makes two direct appearances: first as the conveyor of Zeus' orders to Kalypso that she release Odysseus (5.28), then, in Book 10 (274–308), where he instructs Odysseus in the use of the plant known to the gods as 'moly' as a defence against Kirke's transformative magic. But just as in the *Iliad*, the references made to Hermes on a number of other occasions are equally informative.

Hermes' appearances in Hesiod are significantly fewer, numbering merely three: two in *Theogony* and one in *Works and Days*. Nevertheless, these three mentions of him by Hesiod are no less important in our understanding of the god than those of Homer. In the *Theogony* Hermes is duly noted as one of Zeus' progeny (937–9), at which point he is identified as the herald (*kêryx*) of the immortals. However, before the poet arrives at his notification of Hermes' birth, he has already made mention of Hermes' connection with the goddess Hekate in relation to their shared interest in animal stock. According to the poet, Hermes and Hekate collaborate to ensure that sheep in the sheepfolds increase (*Theogony* 444). In Hesiod's other poem, *Works and Days*, Hermes is introduced as one of the gods who contributes to the creation of the first woman, Pandora, as well as the one directed by his father to announce her name to all and to take this new creation as a gift to mortals. Collectively all of the incidents involving Hermes in Homer and Hesiod, as well as those passages in which some activity of his is merely mentioned in passing, provide a significant amount of information about his abilities, character and role within the pantheon; all things to be considered in more detail in subsequent chapters.

p.11

In terms of Hermes' iconic attributes, as previously noted, they are familiar to Homer: for instance, in the *Iliad* (24.340–4) we find the god donning his winged sandals and picking up his golden *kerykion* before speeding off to carry out the task his father, Zeus, has requested him to complete in the mortal realm on behalf of all the gods. On this occasion, when he meets with the aged King Priam of Troy just outside the city's gates, he appears to him in the form of a young man on the verge of manhood (*Iliad* 24.347), clothed in typical traveller's attire, and this is often the disguise he dons in other tales when he has to encounter some mortal face-to-face. His adoption of a youthful appearance in his direct

encounters with men may also be a reflection of Hesiod's presentation of Hermes as the youngest of Zeus' progeny (*Theogony* 937–9). In the stories in which Hermes appears he is seldom ever old or the eldest of the gods in the tale: youth and youthfulness tend to characterise him in myth.

Such is certainly the case in another poem in which Hermes is the principal character: the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*. The *Hymn* focuses on the god's birth narrative and serves to offer praise to the god by acknowledging the various offices and titles he holds in the cosmos. Just as in the Homeric and Hesiodic narratives, where the appropriate amount of *timê* (honour) is something every mortal and god expects to receive, in the *Hermes Hymn*, the new god is especially concerned with establishing his own 'honours' within his father's government.¹¹

Thus, according to this *Hymn*, Hermes was born in the region of Arkadia in a cave on Mount Kyllene to Zeus and a nymph named Maia, who was one of the seven sisters known as the Pleiades, daughters of the Titan, Atlas (the brother of that Prometheus who attempted to deceive Zeus and caused a rupture in the communion of gods with men). Within the first twenty-four hours of his life, Hermes converts a tortoise into the first seven-stringed lyre; composes the first hymn praising a god's birth (his own!); seeks out and leads away all of Apollo's cows; enacts either the first *Theoxenia* ('guest-meal for the gods') or the first 'equal feast'; and, among other things, invents fire-sticks, thereby firmly establishing his innate intelligence and inventiveness. These aspects of his nature continue to be manifested as the *Hymn* progresses, for in the next twenty-four hours he composes the first theogony, invents the shepherd's pipes, enacts the first formally negotiated exchange of goods and introduces the first trial by arbitration among the gods. To say Hermes is the ultimate precocious child would be an understatement, but it is through these innovative activities that Hermes acquires a place for himself among the Olympian family, one which includes the offices of divine herald; patron of all animals that roam together in herds, flocks and packs, both wild and domestic, and of those mortals who tend them; lord of all acts of exchange, including acts of thievery; patron of the Bee Maidens oracle, representative of a class of divination which worked through the observation and interpretation of nature and by lottery; and a role in the fulfilment of Zeus' divine will as prophesied by Apollo. Though not explicitly stated, the *Hymn* twice implies knowledge of Hermes' office as *psychopompos* ('guide of souls') when Apollo, through a threat, associates him with 'little people' in the underworld, and in the closing lines when it is reported that Hermes received a gift from Hades, which is often interpreted to mean the famous cap of invisibility.¹²

This version of Hermes' birth to Maia at Mount Kyllene in Arkadia is by

far the most common, which is found in abbreviated form in Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* 18, and even receives passing mention in Hesiod's *Astronomy* (quite possibly pre-dating the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*). It remains the version accepted as authoritative by the late mythographer [Ps]-Apollodoros (*Bibliotheca* 3.112) and the Roman authors Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 1.583) and Virgil (*Aeneid* 8.134–5); however, it is not the only account of his birth in circulation. Pausanias is also aware of a rival birth narrative told by the people in the Boiotian town of Tanagra. According to them, Hermes was born to Maia on a hill known as Mount Kerykion in their area of mainland Greece (9.20.3), not in Peloponnesian Arkadia.¹³

p.12

So, while there were competing claims to Hermes' birthplace as well as other versions of his birth-story, the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* remains not only our longest, but our most informative source. However, it does pose some other problems: there is little, if anything, that can be stated authoritatively about its origins. We know neither the date of its composition nor the context of its performance, while dispute over probable authorship continues. Early scholarship thought that the poet and the context of performance were Elian or Arkadian and this position has been taken up again by Zanetto (1996) and S. Johnston (2002). Several scholars of the mid-twentieth century advocated an Attic author and performance contexts (Brown, 1969; Gräfe 1973), and this position has been very effectively argued more recently by Johnston and Mulroy (2009). The several others tend to accept a Boiotian poet and a Delphic context for the Hymn's presentation (e.g., Janko 1982; Clay 1989). The approximate date of the Hymn's composition, formerly accepted as being contemporaneous with the Homeric or Hesiodic narratives (somewhere between the seventh and early sixth century BCE), is now generally considered to be substantially later, being placed sometime between the last third of the sixth century to the first decades of the fifth.¹⁴

Outside of the Homeric *Hymn*, there are relatively few myths in which Hermes plays the leading role. However, he does appear in numerous stories about other gods and heroes where both the contexts in which he appears and the activities he undertakes in those contexts reveal a great deal more about what the Greeks believed about him. The vast majority of these show Hermes intervening as Zeus' representative, either delivering his orders to others, carrying out his directives or assisting his father to achieve some end. For example, in the story told about Zeus' love affair with Inachos' daughter, Io, Hermes is sent by Zeus to take Io away from her guardian, who had been sent to watch over her by Zeus' jealous wife,

Hera. It was Zeus' intention to father a son with Io who would be the ancestor of a great family line, the Danaids. Hera's actions were an obstacle to the fulfilment of Zeus' plans, and they called for the intervention of a god with the requisite abilities to overcome the multi-eyed guardian, Argos, in order to free Io for a rendezvous with Zeus. Several details of this story are handled differently by various poets, but the place of Hermes in it is invariable: he is always the god who intervenes to assist Zeus.

Similarly, Hermes is often called upon to act as Zeus' courier, conveying one thing or another between the three realms in Zeus' cosmos. For instance, in *Iliad* 2 (100–7), at his father's direction, Hermes bestows the divinely fashioned staff of authority on the patriarch of Agamemnon's family line. In a complementary vein, Hermes acts as the leader and guide of those whom Zeus wishes to arrive safely at some distant destination. Thus, it is Hermes whom Zeus requests to lead the three goddesses (Hera, Athena, Aphrodite) to the human whom Zeus has selected to serve as judge in the infamous 'Beauty Contest' (Apollodoros *Bibliotheka* 3.2). In several tales Hermes is found serving as interim caretaker of infants and children in transit, carrying them off to persons chosen by Zeus to serve as their surrogate parents. This is the activity he undertakes in a story about the infant Dionysos (Apollodoros *Bibliotheka* 3.28–9) and in several lesser-known tales, such as those noted by Pausanias: the Dioskouroi, twin sons of Zeus (3.26.2); Asklepios, son of Apollo (2.26.6); and Arkas, son of Zeus and the nymph Kallisto, the eponymous hero of the Arkadians (8.3.8) are all conveyed to their caretakers by Hermes.

p.13

There are a few myths where Hermes appears to have the authority to act on his own volition, but the majority of these relate to his fathering of children with both divine and mortal women. Otherwise, his independent action often involves either the bestowal of favour upon those who have honoured him (or Zeus) justly or the punishment of mortals who have not shown him (or Zeus) the proper respect. These tales are in keeping with the generally held religious belief that the gods would favour those who honoured them and disfavour those who did not. However, even when acting to fulfil some task on behalf of Zeus, Hermes is usually at liberty to accomplish it in a manner best suited to the situation and his innate talents.

There will be occasion to consider several of the tales referred to here as well as others and the concerns they address in more detail when we turn to consider the Key Themes in this study of the god. But first, there

remains one final category of evidence concerning Hermes to consider: one that focuses on where and how he was worshipped.

CULT

The fourth *Hymn to Hermes* not only provides us with details about the god but also serves as an example of one form of worship offered to him. As the term ‘hymn’ suggests, it is a form of worship, a song of praise in honour of a god, composed according to a recognisable pattern found in all such ancient hymns. It opens with an imperative address to an outside authority, in this case a single Muse, to ‘sing’ of the deity who is then named, first in terms of the genealogical relationship to Zeus, and then with a specific cult *epiklesis*. This first cult title and the others given after it (including poetic epithets) are those which the praise-singer believed were most appropriate for his audience (human and divine) for whom the *Hymn* is performed. The *Hymn* then proceeds to narrate the story of Hermes’ birth and the activities undertaken by the young god in establishing his place within the Olympian pantheon. Finally, it concludes with the typical address to the deity in whose honour it has been sung with an imperative meaning both ‘Rejoice’ and ‘Be gracious,’ directed towards the god accompanied by the promise to remember the god in another song. In offering these songs of praise to a deity, the singer and his audience hoped that the god would thereafter intervene positively in their lives.¹⁵

There are no fewer than forty poetic epithets and cult titles used of Hermes in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*. Given the number and variety of offices granted to him in this praise-poem, we might expect him to be a god with an equally large variety of pan-Hellenic festivals in his honour. But this proves not to be the case. Although Pausanias (5.1.7) can tell us that, according to the people of Elis, the first to build a temple in honour of Hermes was Pelops, temples and sanctuaries dedicated solely to him are comparatively few and there is but one known civic festival celebrated in his honour throughout the Greek world – the *Hermaia*, a competitive athletic (and possibly musical) festival for boys under the age of eighteen. Perhaps the most famous of the *Hermaia* Games were celebrated at the town of Pellene in Achaia (in the northern-most Peloponnese), which, by the fifth century, drew competitors from throughout the Greek world, who strove to carry off as the victor’s prize an exceptionally warm woollen cloak. Despite the lack of festivals held specifically to honour him, Hermes was an important member of many civic pantheons, and we do hear of his worship at several publicly funded celebrations in conjunction with one or more of a city’s deities. For instance, Pausanias notes that the people of Messene have a place called the ‘Altar of Sacrifice,’ at or on which are

statues of all the gods in whom the Greeks believe. In Attica, the Athenians have an annual three-day celebration called the Anthesteria, which is a festival held primarily in honour of Dionysos, but at which Hermes is honoured on the third day. Similarly, the festival calendar for the Athenian *deme* of Erchia indicates that Hermes was worshipped in company with the Nymphs, the Earth Goddess, a female deity called 'Parthenos' (most likely Athena), and the river god Acheloös on the twenty-seventh of the month Boedromion and that he shared a festival with Herakles, Aphrodite and Eros on the fourth day of the month Hekatombaion. In fact, the fourth of every month saw a dedication to Hermes being offered in many towns across Greece as he was born on the fourth of the month according to the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* (19). We also have archaeological and epigraphic evidence of a sanctuary belonging to Hermes and Aphrodite at Kato Syme on Crete, where there are strong links to the training of male children and adolescents. This coheres well with evidence from Athens and other centres throughout Greece, where we find Hermes honoured as one of the gods of the gymnasium and the *palaistra* ('wresting-ground'), often alongside Herakles (e.g., in Pausanias 1.30.2 at Athens and 4.32.1 at Messina), indicating a god closely associated with the physical and intellectual maturation of male children from boyhood into adolescence and on into adulthood.¹⁶

p.14

Hermes was also venerated as the founding father of several family lines in various regions of the Greek world. For example, Herodotos (5.7) noted that the royal families of Thrace especially favoured Hermes in worship as their divine ancestor. Although the evidence of this worship is rather late – he is depicted on Thracian coins of the Hellenistic period – Herodotos' notice indicates that the Thracian's aristocracy had adopted Hermes by at least the mid-fifth century. Further east in Arkadia, the town of Tegea (Pausanias 8.47.4) built a temple to Hermes Aigyos, one of Hermes' sons, an Arkadian ancestor important enough for Homer to note his burial near Kyllene (*Iliad* 2.604).

We also hear of other localised civic festivals for the god, which more directly acknowledge his role in the exchange of goods, especially those gained through theft. Plutarch reports that the inhabitants of Samos celebrated an annual festival for Hermes during which everyone was allowed, even expected, to steal something from his neighbour (*Greek Questions* 55). A similar type of festival was celebrated in his name at Gortyn on Crete. But, perhaps not surprisingly, it is in Arkadia, home to Mount Kyllene and Hermes' birthplace in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*, where we find the greatest number of sacred sites and localised festivals

for the god. This evidence displays a large variation in the forms of his worship, with some sites dedicating temples to the god and others merely honouring a simple Herm with dedications (see [Figure 0.2](#)).

p.15

Pausanias reports that he could find no cave on Mount Kyllene with signs of cult activity that might parallel the birthplace described in the *Hymn*; however, he did find the ruins of a temple, which contained a juniper-wood cult statue, on the crest of the mountain (8.17.1-2), while elsewhere in his travels through this territory, all he can note is the presence of Herms at a particular point along the way.



Figure 0.2 Hermes with ram, relief from Ephesus, Turkey

Sites & Photos / Art Resource, NY

Lest it be thought that such humble representations of the god could in no way be as important as temples and marble statues, the testimony from Athens may give pause to reconsider. Thoukydides' reports on the Athenians' reaction to an incident that happened within the city in 415 BCE allow us to gauge the importance of Hermes to the Athenians' sense of security and well-being. According to the historian, just as the Athenians were preparing to embark on their naval assault against Sicily, in the space of one night a group of vandals desecrated all of the Herms in the city. The Athenians, horrified by the sacrilege, and fearing that the god would remove his favour from them, set out immediately to find and punish the perpetrators. For not only did they believe that the success of their expedition had been placed in jeopardy; they interpreted the attack against the city's Herms as the work of conspirators who were intent on overthrowing the city's democratic government. Hermes was clearly believed to be a significant god in matters of state and his favour of particular importance to the well-being of the community.

As well as being worshipped by the entire populace of a city, it is at the level of individual, family and neighbourhood cult, of the sort directed towards the private cult statue of the god within the house or the Herm of one's local *deme*, that the lion's share of Hermes' worship was performed. Just as the Athenian *agora* had Herms set up to mark its perimeter, it would seem that the local *demes* also set up Herms to demarcate their neighbourhood place of assembly. On the fourth of each month, these Herms would receive offerings of food, such as small honey-cakes or fruits, since the fourth, as his birthday, was a day sacred to Hermes every month, not only in one month each year. It is likely that one of the *deme's* elected representatives bore responsibility for ensuring these monthly offerings to Hermes were enacted. But individuals could also make personal offerings to the god on this day, or on any day for which they felt the need to solicit the god's aid or to thank him for aid received.

In this regard Hermes is little different to all the other gods in the Greek pantheon who favour those who honour them. But as Homer noted, Hermes is the friendliest of gods to men (or who most enjoys their company: *Iliad* 24.334–5) as well as the one who has Zeus' ear, so that mortals might appeal to Zeus through him to receive benefits in areas not under Hermes' immediate authority.

MAKING CONNECTIONS, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

With these facets of the god in mind, I return to the questions posed in the second paragraph of this introduction. This study contends that at least part of the answer to the first of our questions about the relationship

among Hermes' various characteristics and activities is presented to us twice within the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*. In lines 10–11 we are told that the bringing to birth of Hermes was the fulfilment of his father's purpose; in other words, Zeus' plan for his cosmos was accomplished and embodied in this child. Much later, when Hermes receives the golden staff from Apollo, we are told that with it he will fulfil every utterance of his father. Hermes, then, is presented in this *Hymn* as agent and fulfiller of all things. From the perspective of mortals, he is the god who brings things to pass. But not just any event—only those ordained by Zeus.

This invites another question which was raised earlier: why was Zeus presented as needing to generate another god in order to accomplish the things in the mortal realm which he ordained? The answer, I would suggest, is twofold: first, Zeus himself is of an austere and distant nature, and, second, this nature was made more austere by the actions of Prometheus. So although he is venerated as the supreme god, the one who has ordered the cosmos and rules it justly, Zeus is not the god who actually brings things to their ordained conclusion. For his purposes to be fulfilled he requires a son who can move rapidly among all the realms in his cosmos and their inhabitants, enacting the executive power granted him by his father. Or perhaps, more accurately, the Greeks felt the need for there to be some other god between them and Zeus who attended to the fulfilment of their chief god's will.¹⁷

p.17

Additionally, for a people who believed that mortals had been granted a portion of life, a portion which included not only the number of one's days but also the amount of wealth, power and privilege one would acquire, the god who wielded Zeus' executive power among them would have to be incredibly versatile, his activities and associations wide-ranging, in order to interact with humanity at all points where one's portions of life could be fulfilled. This need was itself fulfilled in Hermes, who as this initial overview of him suggests is the most diversified of all the gods in the Greek pantheon. The need for versatility in this regard also accounts for the accretions to Hermes' offices over time, as the needs of Greek society and their relationship with the world at large changed. It should be no surprise then that Hermes is found associated with all of the most important activities in which humans can participate, from the birth of a child through its maturation process to its adult engagement with others to its death and transition to the world beyond.

To be active in so many realms of human activity, Hermes had to be endowed with particular types of abilities. Speed was essential. But so too

was quick intelligence and intuitive knowledge, the ability to visualise in advance the steps necessary to get from A to B, to change X into Y, to anticipate the end from the beginning, and to redirect human responses to other gods' actions towards the proper end. Much of this type of activity can best be described by the English verb *translate*. While we customarily use this term in relation to linguistic matters, its semantic range extends far beyond language. According to *Webster's Ninth College Dictionary*, our term 'translate' can be used to convey the following senses:

1 a: to bear, remove, or change from one place, state, form or appearance to another: transfer, transform; . . . a: to convey to heaven or to a non-temporal condition without death; . . . 2 a: to turn into one's own or another language; b: to transfer or turn from one set of symbols into another: transcribe c (i) to express in different terms and especially different words: paraphrase (ii) to express in more comprehensible terms: explain, interpret 3. enrapture 4. to subject to mathematical translation.

In the process of translating, Hermes becomes the divine connector, the conduit and conductor operative within Zeus' cosmos, bringing together sender and receiver, beginning and end, by means of the various activities that are his prerogatives to enact. He is the god who enables transmission, transition, transaction, transformation and even transgression, as well as a host of other actions described by English terms beginning with the prefix *trans-* (itself a Latin prefix signifying 'over', 'beyond', 'through'). But a little further beneath the activity expressed in the English terms 'translate' and 'translation' lies the idea of Hermes. By looking at what Hermes actually accomplishes when he intervenes, it is possible to see that Hermes is the name given to *the power that makes connections and builds relationships*. It is not possible to say with certainty that this was always the case; however, as it emerges from an examination of the iconographic, literary and material evidence from the eighth century bc onwards, it certainly appears as though Hermes was understood by his worshippers to be the god who purposely brought people and things together, for better or for worse, and always in accord with the will of Zeus.

p.18

OVERVIEW

The sheer variety of activities in which Hermes is involved has made him a very difficult god to interpret. Both his origins and the meaning of his name (if there is one) remain uncertain. Yet, for the Greeks, that name symbolised a power worthy of veneration. Thus, he was acknowledged throughout the Greek world as one of the Olympians and received some form of civic worship in every territory, either individually or in

conjunction with one or more gods. The gods with whom he shared a cult are significant: they indicate areas where his worshippers believed the cooperation of all parties was necessary for a positive outcome. Similarly, the places where his altars, shrines and Herms were erected identify important locations where his worshippers believed they would be most able to encounter the god. His iconography highlights several important aspects of his divinity: his extreme mobility, his heraldic authority and his association with life's vital forces. All of these are reinforced and expanded upon in his mythology. We may, with Parker, categorise this involvement in mortal life according to the triad 'transition / communication / exchange': he moves individuals and societies from ignorance to knowledge (communication); from point A to point B (transition); and from want to satisfaction (exchange). Or we might, as previously suggested, prefer to think of these three general areas as subsumable under the single word 'translation' in its various shades of meaning. However, the idea of Hermes can be further articulated by identifying what is accomplished through his interaction. Collectively, the evidence points to Hermes as the power behind purposeful individual and systemic movement *kata moiran* ('according to destiny'): his is the power that makes *connections* and builds *relationships*.

NOTES

- 1 For a study of Prometheus, see Dougherty (2006). In other accounts, such as Aeschylus' fifth-century Athenian tragedy, *Prometheus Bound*, this Titanic god is presented as being a friend to mortals, and, as such, wanted to give them an edge on the Olympians (and seemingly, in the process, get the better of Zeus himself). For a discussion of the events at Mekone and the nature of the trick Prometheus attempted to enact, see Wirshbo (1982); Lloyd-Jones (2003).
- 2 This is especially a problem for Latin and Greek mythographers and fiction writers of the late Hellenistic and Roman periods, such as Pseudo-Apollodoros, Pseudo-Hyginus, Antoninus Liberalis and several others.

p.19

- 3 Hermes is named in the following tablets: Py 172 (= Kn 02 = Tn 316); Py Xn1357, TH Of 31 and Kn D41. For more information on the tablets see Ventris and Chadwick (1956); Palmer (1998). Watkins (1970: 345–50) and Athanassakis (1989: 46) support a possible Indo-European origin; Orgogozo (1949) does not accept this possibility. Farnell V (1909), 1ff. says only that he is pre-Hellenic; Chittenden (1947a: 110, 1948: 24) takes Hermes to be possibly Minoan; Webster (1975: 92, n.6) says Mycenaean; Dietrich (1983: 85) suspects a pre-Mycenaean origin but does not indicate source, Gulizio (2000) attempts to trace his cult from the Bronze Age through to historical times; Frothingham (1916) believed Hermes to be of Babylonian origins; but Penglase (1994: 180–5) dismisses early Mesopotamian links with Hermes as we know him. For a recent overview of the difficulties involved in identifying the majority of

the Greek gods' origin, see López-Ruiz (2015). On the adoption of Hermes by the Greeks, see Herter (1976: 198, n.21).

- 4 Although several nineteenth-century scholars suggest that it was related to Vedic *Sarameya* or *Sarama*. See Maury (1857), v.1, 270ff.; Preller and Robert (1894), v.1, 4th ed., 385ff.; van Windekens (1961, 1962) who offers a fuller assessment of the origins of Hermes and his name; Herter (1976: 196–7) wholly rejects such a connection. Other Greek words that may have been the source for Hermes' name have been suggested: Maury (1857: 437ff.) put forward *heruma* ('shelter') from the verb *heruō* ('protect'); Welcker (1957: 342) thought *hormē* ('movement') from the verb *hormaō* ('set in motion'). Goldman (1942) argues that Hermes' *herm* was derived from Dionysos' *herm*.
- 5 The distinction between poetic and cult titles is not as hard and fast as might be hoped; for instance, the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* is generally accepted as a formal 'song' of worship for the god and it includes many of the 'poetic' epithets that are also found in Homer's and Hesiod's hexameter poems. See Schachter (2000) on variety in epithets and use. This may indicate that such 'poetic' epithets, even the ones common to several gods, were appropriate for use by an individual in a private prayer to Hermes. Doty (1978) has produced a collection of both sorts of adjectives (epithets and *epikleses*) attached to the god's name in literary texts from Homer through to medieval times: there are over 350 of them! For all the epithets for Hermes used in Homer, see Dee (1994); for the epithets of Hermes found in tragedy, see Siebert (2005: 263–9). For an informative study of Hermes' epithets in the Fourth Homeric *Hymn*, see Greene (2005).
- 6 Carpenter (1950) has argued that the *argei*- portion of the name derived from an early term for dogs (*argos*), which would give the name the literal sense of dog-slayer; Davis (1953) suggested that the creature killed by Hermes was originally a serpent or dragon; Burkert (1983: 161–8) takes Argus to be a human cowherd; see now Calame (2011: 338) who sees the name as 'un-Greek' and possibly Asiatic in origin. These arguments are very technical: they are most accessible in English in Chittenden (1947b), although the Greek remains untranslated.
- 7 In the dialogue *Hipparchos* (228d–229b), which was credited to Plato but whose authorship is doubted, there is further mention of Hipparchos' introduction of the semi-iconic *herm* to Athens: see Lavelle (1985). Chittenden (1947b: 103) rejects a pre-sixth-century date for the ithyphallic *herm*; the late addition of this attribute to the Hermes *herms* is accepted by Versnel (2011: 337). For a full range of images of Hermes *herms* see Siebert V.5.2 (1990: 199–216); for *herms* in vase-painting, see Zanker (1965: 91–103); for brief discussion, see Parker (1996: 81–3).
- 8 For a study of the early semi-aniconic (only partially anthropomorphic) representation of six goddesses and the general use of the semi- and wholly aniconic form with comments on Hermes, see Millar (1974); Steiner (2001: 82–3). Archaeological evidence and descriptions from literary sources indicate that aniconic pillars were used to represent a variety of deities, but these typically differed from the Hermes *herms* in a number of ways. Nevertheless, because Pausanias and others refer to the representation of some other gods as 'of the Hermes type' or simply as a 'herm', I have capitalised the term *Herm(s)* in the body of this text to indicate that Hermes is the god represented.

- 9 On the important symbolism of the sceptre/staff generally, see Burnell (1948); on the

- 'magic' qualities associated with certain rods and staves, see De Waele (1927); on the significance of the sceptre/staff for those who wield it in Homer and the context of its use, see Easterling (1989) and Combellack (1945).
- 10 Stewart (2003a, b) discusses the three rows of curls which run across the head of the Hermes craved by Alkamenes, a student of the famous sculptor Pheidias, as typical of a mid-fifth-century style.
 - 11 There are other hymns to Hermes in addition to the most famous Fourth *Homeric Hymn* as well as references to Hermes in the hymns to other gods; for instance, there is the much shorter *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 18 and the fragmentary *Hymn* by the mid-sixth-century bce poet, Alkaios. Hermes is praised alongside Hestia in *Homeric Hymns* 24 and 29, and as the father of Pan in *Homeric Hymn* 19, while his activities are reported in *Homeric Hymns* 2 and 5 in the stories of Demeter and Aphrodite respectively. Along with other abstract concepts such as *aretè* ('excellence', 'manly virtue'), *kleos* ('fame', 'reputation') and *dikè* ('right', 'justice', 'judgement'), *timè* is given ideological significance in the archaic and classical periods through its association with certain types of objects and modes of behaviour that are more highly valued than others.
 - 12 There are at least three different cities in Greece which laid claim to being Hermes' birthplace, and there were several versions of his birth myth in circulation at one time; nevertheless, the version that eventually dominated is the one contained in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*. Thus we find this Greek account in Pseudo-Apollodoros (*Bibliotheka* 3.112) placing Hermes' birth on Mount Kyllene to Maia, as well as the Latin compositions of such Roman authors as Pseudo-Hyginus (*Fabulae* 225) and Virgil (*Aeneid* 8.134–6). The Elder Philostratos (*Imagines* 1.26), however, describes a painting in which Hermes is shown being born on Mount Olympos in Thessaly. Clay (1989: 121–7), followed by Versnel (2011: 368–70), prefer to see Hermes' 'meal' as the first 'equal feast' among men.
 - 13 Even though Hesiod himself was Boiotian and two Boiotian cities laid claim to being Hermes' birthplace, he reports only on Kyllene; in his *Theogony* (938–9), he notes Hermes' parentage, but does not mention the location of his birth.
 - 14 Sheldermine (1981) also advocates for a late sixth-century date while Richardson (2010) is less specific and accepts its composition sometime during the sixth century. At either end of the range, von Eitrem (1906) prefers the early fifth century in contrast with Görgemanns (1976) who argues for a late fifth-century date; Thalmann (1984) believes a composition date prior to the sixth century is most likely. For more on the ancient Greek oral tradition, see Bakker (2005), Nagy (2004), Foley (1999) and the chapters in Morris and Powell (1997). On the Muses' role in the poetic inspiration of Homer and Hesiod, see the discussions in J. Cole (1997).
 - 15 For hymns as a valued offering to the gods, see Calame (2011). On the formal features of ancient Greek hymns, see Bremer (1998) and Furlley and Bremer (2001) with references to earlier scholarship; on the *Homeric Hymns* in particular, see chapters contained in Faulkner (2011).
 - 16 On the relative scarcity of temples dedicated to Hermes in comparison with other gods, see Hussey (1890). A comparatively late Latin author, Pseudo-Hyginus, wrote that 'Pelagus' son, Lycaon, built the temple to Cyllenian Mercury in Arcadia' (*Fabulae* 225), implying that it was the first such temple to be built for the god. For a study of Hermes and his festival, the Hermaia, see Johnston (2002).
 - 17 There are only two events which prompt Zeus to leave Olympos and make direct contact with mortals: the first, and by far the most common, is one where a particularly attractive female member of the species catches his eye. He then deigns to come down into the mortal realm so as to fulfil a very personal desire; the second

is when he decides he needs to test the obedience of mortals' adherence to his divinely sanctioned rules, especially those governing the treatment of strangers. And in this case, he does not come alone, but is typically accompanied by none other than Hermes (see [Chapter 4](#)).



KEY THEMES



I

TALENTS

Every god in the Greek pantheon seems to possess some innate quality (or qualities), such as certain talents or abilities, which render them a ‘natural’ fit for the offices they come to hold in Zeus’ cosmos. In order to appreciate Hermes’ various roles in the pantheon, it is best to begin by identifying the particular talents possessed and displayed by him from birth so that we can better understand how each enables him to perform certain tasks under the leadership of his father.

MÊTIS

First and foremost, it is clear from the first hours of his life that Hermes has inherited something from his father in a far different form than any of Zeus’ other progeny, and that is a quality of mind which the Greeks called ‘*mêtis*’, usually translated as ‘cunning intelligence’. According to Hesiod, Zeus himself acquired this highly desirable mental capacity when he ingested his first wife, who was named *Mêtis*, to prevent her from giving birth to a son who was prophesied to overthrow him as he had overthrown his own father (*Theogony* 886–900). The child with which Maia was pregnant when swallowed turned out to be female and was subsequently born from the head of Zeus as the goddess of cleverness named Athena; her form of ‘cunning intelligence’ manifested itself in wise and prudent decision-making.¹

Hermes’ inherited *mêtis* displayed itself in a very different but no less important manner: rather than being associated with wisdom, Hermes’ ‘cunning intelligence’ was more akin to that which we would call ‘clever’, ‘shrewd’ or ‘sharp’ thinking and near-spontaneous creativity. As those adjectives suggest, there is just a hint that Hermes’ sort of *mêtis* may have an element of sneakiness or mischievousness about it, in keeping with the

‘cunning’ side of the term’s definition. It is this aspect of Hermes’ *mêtis* that informs at least four of the poetic epithets we encounter for the god. Two of these emphasise his versatility, being constructed of an adjective, meaning either ‘varied’ or ‘multi-faceted’ (*poikilo-*), and one meaning ‘many’ (*poly-*); when added to a noun these are, respectively, *poikilomêtis*, ‘of multi-faceted *mêtis*’, and *polytropes*, ‘of many turnings’ or ‘of many means.’ Neither of these terms in itself holds a negative connotation; however, the fact that they are able to suggest a degree of unpredictability about the entity so named invites a certain level of caution, especially when that entity is a god.

p.24

The other two terms are decidedly more negative in describing the nature of Hermes, and given the circumstances within which they arise, that may not be too surprising. Both first appear in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, one in the voice of the narrator (413), the other from the mouth of Apollo, a god who, at the moment he utters them, is simultaneously confused and over-awed by his ‘little brother’ (436). The first of these is *klepsiphrôn*, which has the sense of ‘dissembling’, but here its more literal sense of ‘cheating or darkening (*klepsi-*) one’s understanding or thoughts (*phrôn*)’ is most appropriate: Hermes has just boggled Apollo’s mind by causing the very vines with which his big brother hoped to bind him to take root and entwine around the cattle: Apollo is ‘filled with wonder’ (*thaumazen*) at the marvellous sight (414). Clearly, having one’s thoughts befuddled can be a less than desirable quality to find in a god to whom one may be turning for assistance – unless of course you are praying that he use this particular talent against someone else in the process of assisting you! The second epithet is *Mêkhaniôtês*, meaning (among other things) ‘Contriver’ or ‘Maker of Designs’ (i.e., plots), and this title Apollo uses immediately upon first seeing and hearing Hermes’ newly invented lyre. It is this epithet, in particular, that lends itself to the translation ‘Trickster’ and which more closely associates Hermes with other such figures in world mythology, perhaps even suggesting in the minds of some that he was the replacement for Prometheus, the Greek’s original trickster figure.²

Hermes’ association with cleverness and craft is not limited to poetic epithets and activities. He is also known to have received cult under the title *Dolios*, ‘Hermes of Crafts’ or ‘Hermes of Wiles: Tricky Hermes.’ We know of this cult title from Pausanias, who, passing through Achaia on the way to the town of Pellene, came across a road-side Herm after the style of Hipparchos, which the locals addressed as *Dolios* (‘Crafty’ or ‘Wily’) when they prayed. Pausanias further notes that this particular Herm has a

craved cap on his head and is believed to be ever 'prepared to bring to pass the prayers of men' (7.27.1). Such a cult title may be unique to this particular Herm, as neither Pausanias nor any other author mentions the worship of the god under this divine *epiklesis* at any other location. One suspects that there was a story to go with this Herm and its location, one which explained why he was honoured by this title at this spot; however, Pausanias either was not aware of it or decided not to pass it on to his readers. For our purposes, what this single instance of Hermes with this *epiklesis* demonstrates is the 'diversity in sameness' in the worship of the gods who resided on Olympos from one region of ancient Greece to another: Hermes manifested himself in different ways to different people in different areas, but he was still Hermes, son of Zeus and Maia and member of the ruling pantheon of gods.

STEALTH

In addition to his quickness of mind, Hermes has an innate ability to get things done without drawing attention to himself and without arousing the suspicions of those with whom he does engage. He displays this particular talent when he loosens his swaddling clothes and escapes from his home without attracting his mother's attention. Shortly thereafter he slips back inside and leaves a second time, still without Maia's notice. He then makes his way to Pieria to find Apollo's sacred cows. Once he locates them, Hermes easily evades the four keen-eyed hounds whose job it was to guard the herd, and makes off with all fifty of his brother's cows (*Hymn to Hermes* 4.140ff.). After driving them to his desired destination and completing what he had planned to do with them, Hermes then conceals the cows in a cave and takes himself back home, attracting the notice of neither god nor man nor beast. Thereafter he lets himself into the house by 'turning sideways and going in through the foyer's keyhole like a late summer's breeze, even as a mist' (145-7).

p.25

Hermes' ability to move through space in a stealthy manner can be just as evident in his manner of speaking. This too is put on display almost as soon as he leaves the house. When setting out to get Apollo's cows, Hermes unexpectedly spies a tortoise and (while plotting its death and conversion into a lyre) talks it into accompanying him indoors without raising any suspicion whatsoever (26-40). Later, when he is seen by an old man near Onchestos as he is driving the cows from Pieria to the banks of the River Alpheios, Hermes warns the man against telling anyone what he has seen in words that have a riddling quality to them, but which contain

a threat couched in a promise of benefit that is itself all too clear (90–3). The next morning when Apollo finds Hermes at home and charges him with being a cattle-thief, the young god offers to swear an oath in an attempt to misdirect his brother. His clever way with words is further on display when, after leading his brother back to Olympus so that the case can be put before their father, Zeus, rather than arguing for his own innocence, Hermes defends himself by showing how poorly Apollo has made his case against him.³

In light of just these few highlights from the *Hymn* it should come as no surprise that the same set of epithets and cult titles which serve to acknowledge Hermes' *mêtis* are equally as appropriate for expressing this aspect of Hermes' innate talents. But in addition to these, the *Hymn* gives Hermes other epithets specifically related to his stealthy theft of Apollo's cows. One of these is quite simply the word for 'robber' (or 'thief' or 'rustler'): *Phêlêtês*; another identifies him as the one who has charge over those who engage in these activities: it names Hermes the 'Leader to Thieves' (*Arkhos Phêlêtêon*). Perhaps because of his action against two of Apollo's cows, Hermes is also named *Bouphonos*, 'Killer of Oxen,' although technically Hermes does not kill any male cattle in the *Hymn*. To the best of our knowledge, none of these epithets becomes a title for the god in cult; the closest we get to these ideas in the worship of Hermes is, as we have already noted, the *epiklesis*, 'Dolios'.

CREATIVITY

Hermes' craftiness comes into play in other areas as well. Taking his creative potential in the most literal sense, Hermes certainly follows in his father's footsteps when it comes to his response to a particularly young, attractive and long-lived nymph or mortal female who has 'caught his eye.' Zeus and Hermes are by far the most prolific with regard to the generation of descendants from the appropriation of the body of a female: and often each uses a degree of stealth to achieve his ends. Although initially viewed as a violation of a man's property, mortal families could and did take pride in having an immortal ancestor, often claiming a special authority to rule because of the divine connection. This was particularly true of descendants of the Zeus and his brother, Poseidon; however, to a slightly lesser degree, the same claim could be made for the families who had their descent line enhanced by 'visits' from Zeus' own divine sons.

of which will be of significance to later discussions), spread across the territories of ancient Greece, from the farthest northern reaches of Thessaly to the southern tip of the Peloponnese, and from the eastern coast of Boiotia to the western coast of Messenia. In addition to daughters, which the sources seldom discussed in any detail unless they come to play some significant role in a story, Hermes is recorded as producing over twenty sons by Greek females and a further nine on 'foreign' soil. The majority of these boys matured to become the leaders of their region or city, especially when their mother was a female of high social standing. Perhaps the most famous of these was Keryx, professed to be a son of Aglauros, herself a daughter of the Athenian King Kekrops (according to Pausanias, 1.38.3), and the founding father of the Kerykes line, who had the hereditary tasks of providing the torchbearers for the Eleusinian Mysteries and of officiating at the festival's sacrifice(s). However, the Eleusinians themselves seem to have had a different version of Hermes' relationship with their people, making him the father of Eleusis, after whom the town where the Mysteries were introduced was named. Pausanias (1.38.7) records this version as well, and it is the one which Pseudo-Hyginus preferred to report (*Fabulae* 275). Also at Athens in Attica, according to his *Fabulae* 160, Hermes was reputed to be the father of Kephalos, whom he begat with Kreousa, the daughter of Erechtheus, son of the Athenians' autochthonous ancestor. Despite his pedigree, however, Kephalos does not seem to have generated any lasting legacy.⁴

In Boiotia, Hermes forced his affections on a certain nymph to produce the great hunter, Orion; in the neighbouring land of Lokris, he fathered a son by the name of Abderos, who would become an intimate of Herakles according to Apollodoros (*Bibliothēke* 2.97). Northeast of Boiotia, in Phthia, Hermes produced a number of boys who, as young men, joined the famous voyage of Jason to find the Golden Fleece and return with it so that Jason might regain his hereditary position as ruler of Aeolus. By the maiden Eupolemeia, the daughter of Phthia's king, Hermes fathered two sons, Eurytos and Echion, and another high-bred girl from Alope named Antianeria bore him the nobleman Aithalides. These are the three who journeyed with Jason as part of his crew, although Ps-Hyginus (*Fabulae* 14) credits Aithalides to Eupolemia, whom he identifies as the daughter of Myrmidon. The *Iliad* (16.179–86) tells of a fourth son who fought alongside Achilles and his Myrmidons, one Eudorus who, borne of Hermes' union with Polymele, had a reputation for being fleet of foot like his father.

In Phokis Hermes fathered a son on Chione, another king's daughter; this was the (in)famous Autolykos identified in the *Odyssey* (19.392–9) as already renowned for his clever use of language, especially in the swearing of 'breakable' oaths. Hesiod (fr. 62b Merkelbank-West),

Apollodoros (*Bibliotheka* 1.112) and Pausanias (8.4.6) acknowledge the story but the latter further claims that, in fact, a certain Daidailion was Autolykos' real father. Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 13.146), on the other hand, accepts Hermes' fatherhood, noting that with Cyllenius (i.e., Hermes) as father of Autolykos, Odysseus had noble parentage on both the maternal and paternal sides of his genealogy.⁵

p.27

In the *polis* of Korinth, Pausanias reports (2.3.10) that Hermes had a son named Bounos by Alkidameia, herself a royal princess, and this lad later became that city's king. In the city of Argos in the Peloponnese, Pausanias again provides the information that Hermes via a daughter of Danaus, named Phylodameia, begat Pharis (4.30.2), who went on to become the founder of the city of Pharai in Messene. North of here, in the region of Elis, an attractive girl named Theobule took Hermes' fancy and she produced Myrtilos the famous charioteer of Oinomaos (Pausanias 8.14.10) ([Figure 1.1](#)).

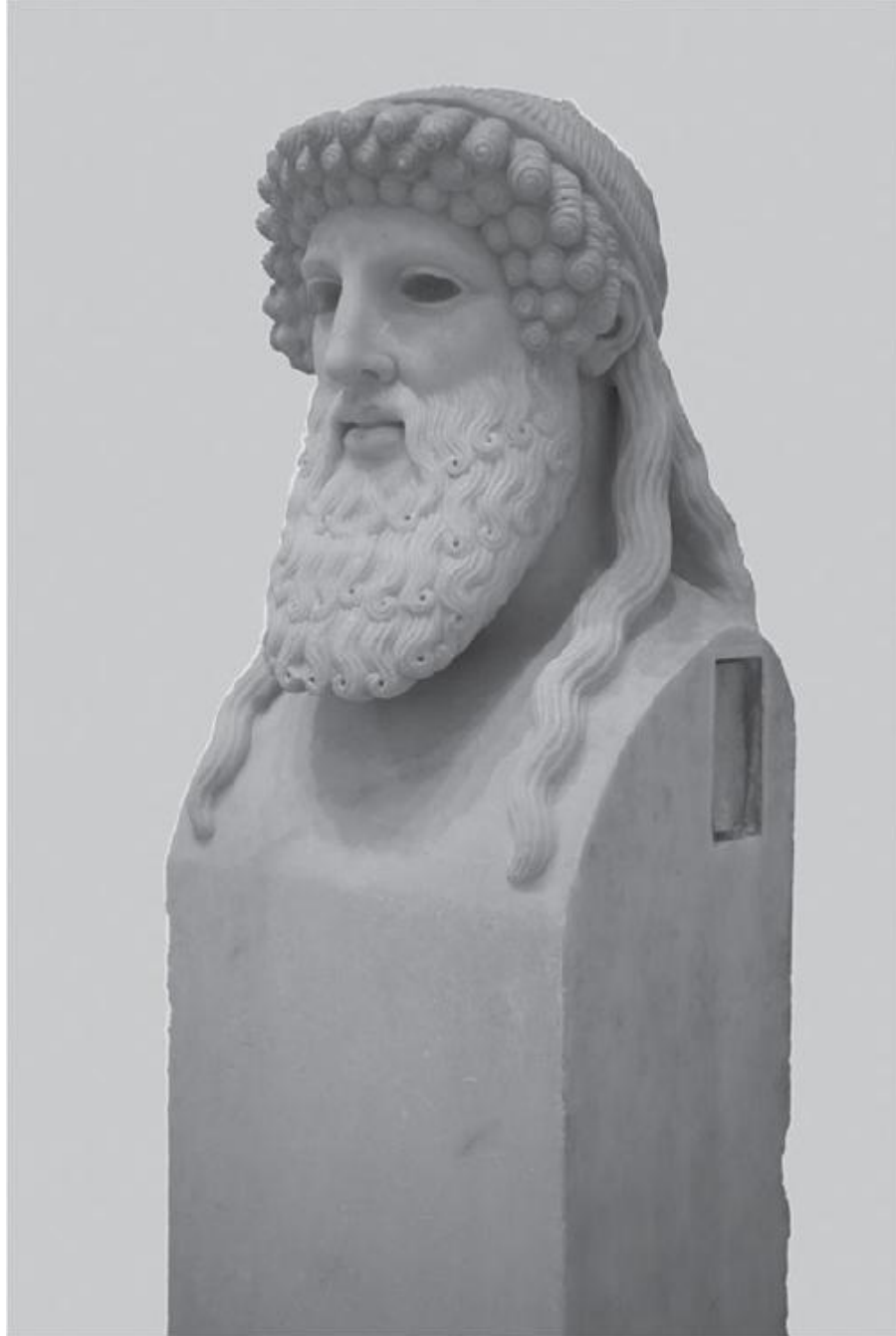


Figure 1.1 'Hermes Propylaios': Greek Herm c. 100 BCE in style of Alkamenes

Archaeological Museum, Piraeus, Greece: Sites & Photos / Art Resource, NY

Next door in Arcadia, Hermes is said to be the father of two boys in this region: one a mortal, Euandros, fathered with a daughter of Ladon, named simply 'Nymphe' whose claim to fame was to be among those who first founded a city where Rome would one day emerge; the other, divine, his son Pan, birthed by Penelope of Homeric fame (*Pseudo-Apollodoros Epitome* 7.38) or by a nymph named Sose according to Nonnos (*Dionysiaca* 14.87–94), who was known as Pan *Agreus* ('of the hunt') (Figure 1.2). Nonnos also credits Hermes with another son named Pan *Nomios* ('of the flocks') by the nymph Penelopeia: this is the version preferred by the Roman orator, Cicero (*De natura deorum* 3.22.56).⁶

Hermes' fathering of sons with nymphs and other young women also moves east, west and south across the islands in the Aegean and Tyrrhenian seas, to include Saon, a king of the island of Samothrace (*Diodoros Siculus* 5.48); Kydon, an aristocratic male on Crete (*Pausanias* 8.53.4; see also the scholiast on *Theokritos* 7.12c); and Libys, a king of Lydia on the western coast of ancient Anatolia (*Pseudo-Hyginus Fabulae* 160), among others. His progeny could also be found in Egypt, Libya, Sicily and Latium, which would later become Roman soil. Additionally, in the territory of Thessaly, a daughter of Doris by the name of Iphthime caught the god's eye and she brought forth as sons three horned creatures known as satyrs: Pherespondos, Lykos and Pronomos. According to Nonnos (*Dionysiaca* 14.105–15), Lykos, like his father, became the herald of the entire group of satyrs, while Pronomos had a reputation for his intellect (no comment is made on Pherespondos).

Producing offspring with mortal females is not a creative activity unique to Hermes: all the male gods have at least one child born from such a union. However, the same *mêtis* that gives Hermes his quickness of mind and ability to move stealthily also underlies some very unique expression of this god's creativity. The Fourth *Homeric Hymn* is again our primary source for instances of Hermes' innate creative vision and intuitive sense of what needs to be done to bring a desired end to fruition. Over the course of his first twenty-four hours of life, Hermes brings into existence no fewer than five items, each from pre-existing materials. He has the ability to see the potential in things, the possibilities in their use, either in whole or in part, in entirely new ways. Thus the very first thing he does as he goes out into the world to catch Apollo's cows is to see a tortoise and instantaneously recognise the usefulness of its shell as a sounding box for a musical instrument, the lyre. The rapidity with which he is able to put thought into action is expressed by the praise-singer thus: 'As when swift thought passes through the breast of a man . . . or as when sparkles dance from the eyes, so glorious Hermes together wrought thought and deed' (43–6). We might rather say, 'in the twinkling of an eye'. It is as if Hermes no sooner visualises something that does not yet exist

than he instantaneously knows how to bring it into being and does so.⁷

But his creative ability goes beyond even this: not only can Hermes recognise the hidden potential in things, but he can also recognise one thing as a 'sign' indicative of something else. Thus, Hermes interprets his 'chance' encounter with the tortoise as a 'sign' that he will meet with good fortune on his quest for *timai* ('honours') within Zeus' ruling council. Hermes also proceeds to assign an equally favourable significance to other members of the tortoise's family: for a mortal, a living tortoise will serve as an apotropaic sign, 'a defence (*echma*) against baneful attacks' (37-8).

p.29

In fact, these two instances are indicative of a significant talent that clearly sets Hermes apart from the other gods: his creative relationship with signs and symbols and their interpretation. The *Hymn* signals this relationship in the use of the term 'most notable' (12) in the description of Hermes' birth; the event itself was, if taken literally, a 'strong sign' (*arisēma*) of things to come. Hermes has the innate ability to establish signs and symbols within his father's cosmos and assign meaning to them as evidenced by his 'reading' of the tortoise as a sign, a 'profitable symbol' (*sumbolon*, 30). As Reece (1997: 38-9) observes,

Here in one of the earliest occurrences of this word in the Greek language it already seems to convey a meaning that is common in later Greek: that of a token, broken in halves, and worn by two people under contract or obligation to each other.

In addition to the *sumbolon* becoming an important marker in commercial transactions, a sphere over which Hermes will be granted Lordship by the end of the *Hymn*, Reece goes on to note that such a *sumbolon* might also represent 'a harmony of minds.' This naming foreshadows the complex ways in which this creature will be used by Hermes and the social institutions with which it will be associated – all of which Hermes is about to establish or refine in some significant way.⁸

Seeing the tortoise first as 'symbol' of his good fortune, Hermes then addresses the creature as 'Comrade of the feast' (*daitos hetairê*), a choral foot-tapper (*choroitupe*) of lovely form' (*phuen eroessa*, 31). In the 'twinkling of an eye' Hermes not only can see what can be made of the tortoise but also where she will be most at home: it will be a venue where gods will once again come together over a meal (*dais*) with the men who are hosting them as their guests (*xenioi*). Indeed, this will be a new sort of meal accompanied by a new sort of music, two more of Hermes' creative

activities during his first day of life.⁹

But before he sets about creating this new meal, Hermes takes the time to test out his new creation by accompanying himself as he sings a few 'back-handed compliments' of the sort sung at the festivities of young men (55–6), before proceeding to sing his first full song – a hymn celebrating his begetting and birth and the richness of his home and the beauty of serving women (they are nymphs) who attend to him and his mother; in other words, Hermes composes 'off-the-cuff' the first ever hymn for a god. Satisfied with his invention and his song of self-praise, Hermes sets off again to get Apollo's fifty cows from Pieria and drive them to a place where his new meal can be prepared and the cows concealed.¹⁰

It is during this sequence that we discover that in addition to being sign-maker, Hermes is also a sign-reader: he knows that the tracks left by the cows might be recognised by another as 'signs' that could lead them to their hiding place. The same realisation was made with regard to his own tracks. To create a confusing sign for the cows' movement, Hermes simply turns them around and makes them walk backwards (76–8); but to conceal his own footprints, he devises a novel form of footwear, made from interwoven switches of tamarisk and myrtle, which, when worn, leave very large and confusing marks on the ground (79–86). If Hermes is not the first god to see the earth as a surface upon which to inscribe signs, he appears to be the first to conceive of inscribing deliberately misleading signs on its surface.

p.30

Hermes' sandals were inventions of the moment, meant to serve the needs of a particular situation: they could be (and were) readily discarded when that need had been met. The next thing Hermes invents, again brought into being to meet an immediate need, would be a tool of repeated value to humankind, for it gave mortals the ability to re-ignite a fire without having to fetch a living flame from one already burning to ignite another. Hermes' fire-sticks (108–11) were an improvement on Prometheus' earlier theft of a living flame from Hephaistos' hearth (*Theogony* 565–67): that fire had to be kept continually burning since there was no way for mortals to re-steal the ember from its Olympian source.

His creative acts do not end here: later on, after gifting his lyre to Apollo, Hermes invents a new instrument for himself, the shepherd's pipes (511). Indeed Hermes manages to accomplish so much in the space of just two days that Apollo addresses him as 'Busy One' (*Poneumene*) while simultaneously naming him 'Ox-slayer (*Bouphonos*)', 'Contriver' and

‘Comrade of the Feast’ (436), the very title Hermes had given the tortoise in her transformation into the lyre. It is surely significant that these two (Hermes and the lyre/tortoise) are the only ones to receive the latter epithet and thus to be renowned for their association with this most convivial of occasions.¹¹

WIT

So Hermes can think ‘laterally,’ an innate ability that enhances his creative abilities and, when combined with his stealth, allows him to accomplish much in the natural world without being seen. To these three talents we may also add ‘wit.’

In its original sense, this old English word meant something akin to ‘mental acuity,’ the way that we might say today that someone is ‘sharp’; that is, very quick to grasp an idea and able to engage with it immediately. In a more nuanced sense, it can indicate that someone is ‘clever,’ which may suggest that they are both ‘quick-witted’ and just a little bit misleading. As such it may be tempting to include this as another expression of Hermes’ *mêtis*; however, there is more to being ‘witty’ than this: it is a mental quality of someone who has a way of making others laugh by making use of surprising turns of phrase or gestures which defy expectations. Hermes, in the *Hymn* and elsewhere, displays all of these various senses of ‘wit.’¹²

Hermes first reveals the connection between wit and laughter almost immediately upon exiting his home. Before he speaks a word to the tortoise he happens upon at his courtyard’s gate, Hermes laughs (26–9). This spontaneous, eruptive, unexpected expression of joy occurs in those moments when one instantaneously sees a connection between two things that had not been recognised before. The epithet used of Hermes here (*eriounos*) is one that has generated a good deal of debate, as its meaning remains uncertain; nevertheless, opinion is settling around ‘swift runner,’ as opposed to its contextually appropriate but novel sense of ‘most beneficent.’ This may well be the first eruption of laughter in the cosmos, here (unfortunately) at the tortoise’s expense, but nonetheless an important innovation in self-expression. It is certainly not the last.¹³

Hermes himself becomes the cause of laughter a little later from none other than his accuser and initial adversary, Apollo (254–85). After searching the house, Apollo demands to know where his cows are under

threat of making Hermes a permanent resident in the underworld, unless he reveals where they are hidden. In response, Hermes denies all knowledge of such things as cows, going so far as to attempt to shame Apollo by asking him to imagine how foolish he would look in front of the other gods in charging a new-born with the theft of his cows. Hermes concludes by offering to swear an oath by *his father's* head that he knows nothing of cows, of their theft or of their whereabouts. Immediately afterwards, however, Hermes gives the game away by deliberately and obviously looking here and there while whistling. Heiden (2010: 419) recognises the significance of the young god's antics here: by 'wiggling his eye-brows and whistling (278–80) he signals that the oath is void ("*halion*", 230); the effect suggests equivalence to crossed fingers.' This causes Apollo to 'laugh softly' (281) and offer his little brother a back-handed compliment on his skill at tale-telling, by which he reveals his own understanding that Hermes does know (but is not prepared to tell him) the location of his cows. This moment of laughter breaks the tension, although it does not resolve the problem; what it does do is create some space for the further verbal exchanges until Hermes takes the initiative and begins to lead Apollo back to Olympos and their Father.¹⁴

Standing before the Supreme Olympian, Hermes is the cause of yet more laughter. After Apollo's account of his case against the youngest son of Zeus, Hermes offers his own speech in self-defence, which he immediately follows with very similar glances (or winks) as were given to Apollo at the end of that earlier denial. At the sight of this Zeus laughs, not softly like Apollo, but out loud (389). The poet tells us the reason: it was 'on seeing his basely-cunning-minded (*kakomēdea*) son's skilful denial concerning the cows' (389–40).

Perhaps in an ironic nod to the Herms of Hipparchos and their pithy saying accompanying their distance markers, some anonymous poet, in an epigram carved on the side of Herm, has his Hermes acknowledge that he does not really have much to offer those who contribute to his pile of stones save knowledge of how much further they have to go till they reach Goat fountain (*Palatine Anthology*, 16, 254). This is also in stark contrast to the majority of Herms that invite a passer-by to pause and refresh himself in the shade of a tree and with a cool drink from a nearby fountain.¹⁵

There is a certain degree of playfulness in Hermes' mildly subversive actions and words; perhaps this is why he becomes one of the most frequently seen gods in Athenian comedy and satyr play. In these genres he often raises a knowing laugh from the audience at his own expense. This he surely does in Aristophanes' comedy, *Peace*: when promised that many festivals (formerly devoted to other gods) will be celebrated in his honour if he will assist the Athenians in their recovery of the goddess

Peace from a deep pit (418–20), Hermes eagerly agrees. And, in agreeing to assist the mortals with their quest, he will gain additional benefits – other states will offer him sacrifice under a new *epiklesis*, ‘*Alexikakos*’ (‘Averter of Evils,’ 421–2). This scenario is a comic conversion of Hermes’ quest for divine recognition (and the mortal veneration that will come with it!) into an omnipresent innate desire to acquire ever more. Agreeing to assist on these terms, Aristophanes’ ‘Hermes’ shortly thereafter confirms this impression when, asked to lead off a prayer for success, he is offered a golden vessel (a *phialê*) for the pouring of a libation, and responds: ‘Oh Dear, I am *always* a softy for golden vessels’ (*Peace* 425).¹⁶



Figure 1.2 'Pan, Son of Hermes', second century BCE marble

Hermes is a wonderful god to make play with; nevertheless the laughter generated in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* is founded on Hermes' innate understanding of the 'way things are' and the 'way things are supposed to be'. From Hermes' point of view, things as they currently stand are decidedly *not* as they should be.

p.33

PROPRIETY

In addition to the innate qualities Hermes displays within the forty-eight hours of his birth in the *Hymn*, there is one final aspect of his nature that is of even more significance in terms of Hermes' goal to be accepted in the ruling group of gods and that is his consistent concern with what is proper, especially that which is in keeping with precedent and good order. The Greek terms that express these ideas are *kosmos* ('order'), *eutaxis* ('arrangement') and *paradeigma* ('precedent'). This concern may sound odd in light of the fact that Hermes temporarily becomes a thief in order to gain attention as a son of Zeus worthy of recognition on Olympus; however, the fact that he intuitively knows that his actions will generate a counter-action indicates that he understands far more about the world into which he has been born than this: he knows how to make use of existing norms to get what he wants. To more fully appreciate Hermes' concern for order and apportionment, it is necessary to rehearse a little more of the story prior to Hermes' birth and view some of the evidence of Hermes' talents from a different perspective.

In the history of the cosmos, there have been moments when unions between gods have produced monsters and, although all of Zeus' progeny eventually turn out to be benevolent towards the Olympians, the possibility that the pattern of the *Theogony* may once again be repeated through the male offspring of a union between a Sky-figure (Zeus) and an Earth-figure (Maia) may not yet be wholly eliminated. According to that pattern, the youngest son of a divine union rose up against his father and overthrew him to take control of the cosmos. In each case he was aided in his usurpation by his mother, who harboured bitter feelings towards the father. Hermes' own father, Zeus, became the supreme Sky-god following his assault on Kronos and the rest of the Titans who stood with the latter against Zeus. Hermes' maternal grandfather was Atlas, himself a Titan, brother of Prometheus and grandson of Themis, whom Zeus appointed to stand with Heaven upon his shoulders, forever holding it apart from Earth as punishment for his rebellion (*Theogony* 509-11, 517-20). Atlas'

daughter, Maia, seems to share affinities with Gaia, 'Earth', so closely in fact that her name, which means 'mother', could be used as another title for 'Mother Earth'. And so in Maia's union with Zeus we find echoes of the original union that initiated the sequence of violent successions.¹⁷

Theogony, likewise, reveals that Zeus would have suffered the same fate as his forefathers had he not swallowed Mêtis, who, as noted earlier, was destined to produce his usurper-son from their union (886-93). While this action meant that Zeus would forever reign as supreme god, it did not preclude the possibility that a son could be born who would challenge his father or otherwise threaten the stability of his rule. This possibility notwithstanding, Zeus deliberately undertook to produce a child with Maia. In fact, it would seem that he was so determined to produce this child that he made frequent visits to her before she finally conceived. So we might say that Zeus' purpose, referred to at line 10 of the *Hymn*, is twofold: primarily he seeks to confirm his apparent success in breaking the pattern of succession; secondarily, following the removal of Prometheus, he desires to create a god who can effect change without compromising his divine authority.¹⁸

p.34

From the very first it appears as though Hermes may, in fact, be bent on repeating the old pattern. He emerges from his cave determined to steal the property of another god, but this theft is delayed by a killing of the first creature he chances to encounter en route. Despite the future benevolent uses envisioned for this tortoiseshell lyre, its creation is based on violent action and deceit, the very same strategies employed by Hermes' ancestors. Moreover, the possibility that the old pattern may be about to repeat is made more probable by the poet's own delay in providing an explanation for Hermes' actions and the desires which motivate them until after the young god has set his plan in motion. Only when confronted by his mother on his return from his night-time exploits do we hear why Hermes has acted as he did (162-81).¹⁹

It turns out that the proper distribution of honours and the holdings to which they are attached are of deep concern to this new god. When Maia attempts to chastise Hermes for his thieving activity (154-61), he responds as would a young adult letting his mother know that he is not some naïve child but a youth determined to see that they both receive the respect and immortal blessing that being divine should afford them: he will be their provider. More particularly, it is Hermes' own place in the divine order, his identity as a god, which concerns him most. Being born of Zeus and Maia, he feels entitled to receive *timai* from his father (170-5). And not just any

timai: he specifically wants a share of his brother's *timai*, and his actions are designed to bring pressure on Zeus to re-apportion those honours between the two siblings.

Hermes has just proved to himself (and no doubt to his all-seeing father) that he can be an exemplary thief if his father should deny him a more honourable place in the *kosmos* (174-5). But this is not the honour he seeks: for both himself and his mother, Hermes desires to have the divine companionship of the gods and the prayers and offerings from mortals (167-9). Thus, his first step in achieving this aim is to demonstrate to Zeus that, although he has the innate abilities to harass the Olympians (174-5), he is not actually a threat to Zeus' sovereignty. Thus, it would be correct to state that everything Hermes does in the *Hymn* is directed towards winning for himself a place of his own in the divine order, with his identity as a god fully recognised.²⁰

As the master of signs and sign-reading, Hermes immediately understands that cattle hold symbolic value in the honour system of the gods: to deprive Apollo of even one of his cows is to reduce his honour. This also explains why Apollo is so keen to get his cows back. So, in selectively removing the fifty cows of Apollo from among the herd set apart and belonging to the gods, Hermes demonstrates his intuitive ability to discriminate among things and make use of that which is appropriate to the needs of the moment.

His concern with correct apportionment is given explicit expression in the way in which Hermes goes about dividing up his roasted cows for distribution. After first cutting them up into twelve portions, he proceeds to add a '*geras*' ('portion of honour') to each. In the mortal realm, as we see it in Homer, the *geras* was typically awarded only to a single privileged guest, but for Hermes, who seems to be establishing the very practice at this moment, *all* the guests at this inaugural event are worthy of receiving an extra portion of honour, including Hermes himself.²¹

This same concern for propriety and apportionment of honour is in evidence when Hermes sings his first public theogony for Apollo, beginning with Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses. She too is Titan like his mother, and mother of seven (or nine) daughters by Zeus known as the Muses. So Hermes begins his theogony with the holder of memories, and 'authorises' (*kraînôn*) each god's place in the divine order under Zeus in the order of their birth, including himself. This is but one reason why Tzifopoulos (2000) sees Hermes as the master of proverbial wisdom.

Hermes then creates yet another opportunity for the display of his concern for order and apportionment when he is confronted by Apollo and accused of being a thief. When his playful denials are understandably rejected, Hermes insists on taking the matter before Zeus, in part because Apollo has forecast, apparently of his own accord, that he will throw Hermes into Tartaros where he will become a denizen of the underworld (256–9) and later, that Hermes shall hold the dubious honour of ‘Lord of Thieves’ among the deathless gods (290–1). This last title is one which Hermes himself said he would claim if he were not granted a share in Apollo’s *timai* by his father, so it has become especially important to bring the matter before Zeus, so that he can award Hermes his *timai* as he sees fit.

These, then, are Hermes’ talents, each of which, individually or in combination with one or more others, renders him uniquely prepared for the offices he will hold among the ruling gods of Olympos. In light of this, it is worth making one further observation: of all the gods in the Greek pantheon, Hermes is the god ‘who most enjoys the company of mortals’ according to Homer; he is certainly the one most frequently found engaging with humans far more directly than any other god from the ruling pantheon(s). This may be, as Versnel (2011: 319–27) suggests, because, having been born from a long-lived though ultimately mortal mother, he is more human-like than the other gods in terms of being subject to human wants and weaknesses. While such leanings may diminish his divinity from one point of view, the *Hymn* suggests that this too was part of Zeus’ plan for his youngest son: he needed a divine offspring who would understand and be able to interact with mortals, and find enjoyment in the process of doing so, as well as one who would be unlikely to attempt to ‘out-smart’ him as Prometheus had done.

OVERVIEW

In the preceding discussion, five main aspects of Hermes’ divinity have been identified that uniquely enable him to take his place in Zeus’ cosmos among the gods of the ruling pantheon. From his father Hermes has inherited a portion of ‘cunning intelligence,’ Greek *mêtis*, which makes him a god with exceptionally sharp mental capacity. This will allow him almost instantaneously to access a situation, whether between gods or between mortals, and intuitively see the most effective way to intervene in order to carry out his task. Often times, his interventions need to happen without the notice of the parties involved and for this his natural speed and ability to move stealthily prove a particularly useful asset. Sometimes in order to carry out his task Hermes will need to create something new, and here his unique way of seeing things and his skill in being able to

visualise an alternate use for pre-existing items give him an advantage in engaging more directly in the mortal realm. When his creative powers are joined together with *mêtis*, Hermes becomes a formidable god indeed.

p.36

However, the remaining two natural talents serve to render Hermes a far less intimidating god than he would be otherwise. Although his innate wit could be continuously used to play ‘mean’ jokes on both mortals and gods, it is seldom deployed in this way when on a mission for Zeus – unless, that is, his father’s aim is to punish some mortal for an offence against himself or one of the other gods. Then his laughter-creating wit might be used to humiliating effect, especially when combined with his other talents.

It is perhaps because of Hermes’ innate concern for proper order and apportionment that the first four talents are not typically used for disruptive ends. Were Hermes left to his own devices, one might expect him to become a perpetual ‘practical joker’ who would rob a person blind just for the pleasure of doing so; but that is not the god encountered in the stories in which he plays a part. In them, Hermes is found acting in the offices granted him by Zeus.

NOTES

- 1 For an informative study of this quality of mind, see Detienne and Vernant (1991). Athena shares with Hermes this mental acuity, although she makes use of it in significantly different ways. *Theogony* does not relate the story of Athena’s birth from Zeus’ head, or place a particular emphasis on her ‘cunning intelligence’. For a study of Athena and earlier scholarship on this goddess, see Deacy (2007), who views her *mêtis* as more akin to that of a ‘trickster’ rather than as a goddess of wisdom and good council, as does Burkert (1985: 141–2).
- 2 Some of the activities Hermes performs in the *Hymn* reinforce the impression that this new-born god is Zeus’ ‘new’ trickster figure (replacing Prometheus). See [Chapter 5](#), pp. 87–102, for fuller discussion.
- 3 Hermes’ cattle-raiding has some intriguing parallels with the practices of some youths in certain areas of modern Greece. For discussion, see Haft (1996).
- 4 Pindar (*Olympian* 8) names one of Hermes’ daughters, Angelia – appropriately enough, a feminine form of the word for ‘messenger’ – while Philostratos calls Palaistra Hermes’ daughter because she is the one who discovered wrestling (*Imagines* 2.32); however, in *Fabulae* 241, the Latin author is less certain, indicating that Kephalos was fathered either by ‘Mercurius’ or Deion.
- 5 On Hermes as the master oath-swearer, see Callaway (1993) and Fletcher (2008).
- 6 It is somewhat frustrating that all of these references to Hermes’ fathering of Pan come from relatively late sources. They are included here as this relationship

becomes generally accepted in later works.

- 7 For other versions of Hermes' creation of the lyre, see Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.113; Pseudo-Hyginus *Astronomia* 2.7; in Philostratos (*Imagines* 1.10) the speaker prefaces his description of the lyre in a painting with a brief mention of its creation by Hermes. For later instances of Hermes as inventor see Strabo (1.816); Plutarch (*Symposion Questions* 9.3.2); Pseudo-Hyginus (*Fables* 277).
- 8 A second-century ce Latin author, Pseudo-Hyginus, classifies Hermes (Roman name, Mercury) among those who contributed letters to the alphabet by observing the flight of cranes (*Fabulae* 277).
- 9 Nagy (1990: 38, n.110) notes the expression for dancers in another culture that speaks of 'get[ting] the word under foot'. On music and dance in ancient Greece, see Lonsdale (1993). For Hermes' actions by the Alpheus as the precedent for human feasts, see Clay (1987). The lyre is the instrument most commonly used in the entertainment of guests at such feasts in Homeric narrative (e.g., *Odyssey* 17.271; 21.428–30), which seems to set the precedent for after-dinner entertainment down through the archaic and classical periods and beyond. See [Chapter 4](#) for further discussion. Martin (2010: 33) makes the observation that in contrast to the music of the kithara, which is associated with prestigious occasions, the lyre and the songs sung to it are better suited to the 'private, non-ritual, and consolatory' contexts of the home.

p.37

- 10 Reece (1997: 38) makes this same observation.
- 11 Pseudo-Apollodorus reports a novel spin on the after-effects of Hermes' creation of musical pipes subsequent to his gifting of the lyre to Apollo; according to the story he knows, it was Apollo's desire to possess the pipes as well as the lyre that motivated him to offer Hermes the golden staff in exchange. Not satisfied with that offer, Hermes requested that the art of prophecy be added, and this is why Apollo taught him how to perform divination with pebbles (*Bibliotheca* 3.115). Reece (1997: 38) also observes the restriction of this title to Hermes and the tortoise in hexameter verse. For Hermes as a/the music god, see Hübner (1986); on the positive effects of music, see Motte (2008) and Kaimio (1974).
- 12 Bungard (2011) suggests that the sort of laughter Hermes introduces to the ordered world of Zeus makes an auditor aware of the unrealised 'surplus potential' of that order: things have to have 'potential' to be other than they are – or better than they are assumed to be. On the importance of laughter generally, see Huizinga (1971); on laughter in Greek and Roman myths see Gilhus (1997).
- 13 In Evelyn-White's (1914) translation of the *Hymn*, he translates the term as 'luck-bringer' throughout; the newest 2003 edition by West has adopted 'courser' as a variant of 'swift runner'. On Hermes' distribution of portions as first 'equal feast' see Clay (1987).
- 14 There is certainly humour in the choice of object by which to swear here: as chief god in the pantheon, Zeus is permitted to affirm his own word by a simple nod of his head. Other gods do not swear by Zeus' head, but by Styx, the deadly waters of the underworld (Hesiod, *Theogony* 401), so that whoever swears falsely will spend one full year in the underworld, deprived of Olympian companionship as well as the nectar and ambrosia typically enjoyed by the gods, and then a further nine years is spent below, still denied the companionship of the Olympians, but apparently (although this is not explicitly stated) able to consume nectar and ambrosia again

(*Theogony* 793–8). See Clay (1981–2) for discussion of the expression ‘immortal and ageless forever’ concerning the gods.

- 15 Hermes’ ability to elicit laughter may be one reason why we find ‘laughter-loving’ Aphrodite paired with this god at several cult sites around Greece.
 - 16 Hermes appears in one other of Aristophanes’ extant comedies: *Wealth*; he was also a character in Kratinos’ *Dionysalexandros* and in Sophokles’ satyr-play, *Ichneutai* (*Searchers*), which is based on the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*; it is also believed that he was a character in Aischylos’ satyr-play *Psychostasis* (*Soul-Raisers*). For more on Hermes in satyr-play, see Sutton (1980). *Alexikakos* is more typically one of Herakles’ cult titles. See Stafford (2012: 176–7, 196). The word translated ‘softy’ here is one meaning ‘merciful’ or ‘having pity for.’ On the problem of gods sacrificing to themselves or to other gods, see now the extended study by Patton (2009).
 - 17 As Leto herself may have been another early ‘earth-goddess,’ this is perhaps why the island of Delos is hesitant to receive Leto when she is pregnant with Apollo. For the island knows of a prophecy that this son of Zeus will be haughty and violent (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 67–78). Preller and Robert (1894, Vol. 1: 390) note use of ‘Maia’ for ‘Mother Earth.’ Compare Aeschylus (*Choephoroi* 414) where the chorus calls upon Earth with the term *Maia*. The third edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* s.v. *Maia* acknowledges the possibility that ‘she may once have been a goddess of the *kourotrophos* type’ associated with sacrifice and fertility in cult; see also ‘*kourotrophos*’.
 - 18 The Greek here uses a verb-ending (called a ‘frequentive’) to describe Zeus and Maia’s union, indicating that it was a repeated activity: literally ‘he kept on visiting, *misgesketo*’. Clay (1989) has argued that Hermes’ birth turns the static cosmos of Zeus into a dynamic one where change is once again made possible.
- p.38
- 19 Zeus, too, is initially concealed in a cave prior to his assault on his father (*Theogony* 482–3). Hermes’ words to the tortoise are partly deceptive in that by stating that it is safer inside one’s home than outside, he implies that he will protect him inside the cave (31).
 - 20 Apollo will later pronounce that he will be ‘known among the deathless gods as the Lord of Thieves’ (291–2). Is it significant that Apollo specifically claims that Hermes will hold this title among the immortals rather than among mortals? Perhaps it is because Hermes’ theft was not committed against humans but against gods.
 - 21 See Bakker (2013: 38–42) on the importance of meat and its distribution in the mortal realm. On both the nature of the sacrificial meal and on whether Hermes includes himself as a recipient, there remains some debate among scholars; for the most recent discussion of the opinions held by various parties, see Versnel (2011: 309–19).



2

TRANSMISSIONS

To 'transmit' is to 'send or convey across' some tangible or intangible thing from one place or person to another. Transmission can thus involve the movement of simple, spoken or written words or ideas as images from sender to receiver and also more substantial physical objects. In all its various forms Hermes is the god called upon to 'transmit' such goods both within and between the Olympian realm of gods and the earthly realm of mortals. Indeed, Hermes' status as the 'Divine Transmitter of Words' is perhaps best known by his most frequently used title: Messenger. But there are several other areas and activities that involve the carrying of commands, instructions or goods between parties and, as we will see, Hermes has a share in these as well.

DIVINE MESSENGER, ZEUS' HERALD

The fact that Hermes serves as the deliverer of messages for the gods is beyond doubt as he is identified and even addressed by two titles which state as much: he can be called *Angelos Athanatôn* ('Messenger of the Deathless or Undying Ones, hence 'Immortals' or more succinctly 'of the Gods'), or *Angelos Makarôn* ('Messenger of the Blessed Ones, i.e. the gods). In fact, the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* opens by calling him *angelos athanatôn eriounios* – 'swift (or "beneficent") messenger of the gods' (3). Some 1200 years later, the poet Nonnos in his *Dionysiaca* (3.433) – a grand epic in forty-eight books – can still refer to Hermes as the *angelos athanatôn* and expect his readership to appreciate the title.¹

This poetic epithet accords with what we have already noted about Hermes' innate abilities: if there is one thing the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* reveals about this god, it is his mastery of the spoken word. Whether it is saying just the right thing to get the tortoise to drop her guard, offering to

swear a carefully worded oath, or composing an impromptu song about his parents' love affair or an equally spontaneous hymn in honour of all the gods' relative rankings under Zeus, Hermes is a god who possesses an innate understanding of language and its uses, in keeping with his talent as a sign-maker and reader. It is not in the least surprising, then, that the Olympians, at Zeus' suggestion, accept Hermes as their official messenger. Both Homer and the composers of several of the *Homeric Hymns* know him to have this honour among the heavenly gods, and even to serve the gods below the earth, Hades and Persephone, in this capacity as well.

p.40



Figure 2.1 'Hermes, Zeus and Iris', Berlin painter, early fifth century BCE

Musée du Louvre, Paris, France / (Herve Lewandowski) © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

So despite the fact that in Homer's *Iliad*, Iris is the goddess who serves as Zeus' messenger, while Hermes is seen engaging with mortals in other ways according to Zeus' purposes, in the *Odyssey* Hermes' role of official spokesperson for the divine ruler of the world is well established (Figure 2.1). So, it would come as no surprise to Homer's auditors when the bard reports that in addressing his 'dear son' Hermes in front of the council of

the gods, Zeus begins by first reminding him that he has been ‘at other times our messenger’ (*angelos*, *Odyssey* 5.29), and proceeds to request that he now ‘declare’ his divine mandate – with which all the gods are in agreement (5.30) – to the goddess Kalypso regarding her release of Odysseus. Using the poetic epithet ‘Glorious’ (*kudimos*) to describe Hermes in his *Theogony*, Hesiod identifies the son of Zeus and Maia by another of his official titles: ‘Herald (*keryx*) of the undying gods’ (*Theogony* 938–9).²

In light of these two examples it may seem that the terms ‘messenger’ and ‘herald’ are but two ways of naming the same office and the activities associated with it – indeed, these two offices are often conflated. However, it is important to recognise the difference. Put quite simply, anyone can function as a messenger: all that is required is an individual with the ability to convey some information from a sender to a receiver. Thus in fifth-century Athenian tragedies we see the role of a ‘messenger’ being played by a range of characters from servants and shepherds to nurses and noblemen. Sometimes these characters have been directed to deliver a specific message, but frequently they are little more than the bearers of news, providing information in their own words to the uninformed about some event that has transpired, one that is likely to have an effect, for good or ill, on their auditor’s life. Thus, when Hermes serves as a messenger between two or more gods, he is merely conveying information that the sender wants the other(s) to know, but which that god is (for whatever reason) not able to deliver in person.³

p.41

In contrast to this rather open reportage of a personal communication or some significant event, the term ‘Herald’ is the title of a state official, one who has been granted the authority to speak in the name of the head of state and who is sent by that official to deliver, verbatim, that official’s words. All the authority of the person who directs the Herald is vested in that Herald for the delivery of his words. This means that when Hermes arrives and speaks in his official capacity as Zeus’ Herald, his auditors understand that they are hearing the words spoken by Zeus himself and are expected to respond as they would to Zeus. This relationship between Hermes and Zeus is given expression by the mythographer Pseudo-Apollodoros (*Bibliothèque* 3.115.7–8) when he notes that Zeus established Hermes to be his own (*eautou*) Herald as well as to be Herald of the gods below the earth. This makes sense given that Hermes is the only god who is granted permission to convey persons and things between the upper worlds and the underworld (*Hymn to Hermes* 4.57–3). Pausanias too recognises the importance of the position when he records (8.32.4.11) that

Hermes is Zeus' 'minister'; in other words, he is a god who looks after Zeus' concerns. We would hardly think a government official with the title of, say, 'Minister of Foreign Affairs' to be an insignificant person in the running of a country, and nor should we think of Hermes as a lesser deity in the operation and maintenance of his father's cosmos.⁴

It is in his capacity as Zeus' official substitute that Hermes engages with Hades in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*: when all the other gods have been unable to persuade Demeter to let go of her anger and relinquish her plans to prevent anything planted from coming up (332), Zeus sends Hermes to 'persuade' the Lord of the Underworld to release Persephone, Demeter's daughter, so that she may return to the world above. Hermes, of course, does as requested and thereafter serves as Persephone's official escort back to her awaiting mother. In honour of Hermes' role in the return of Demeter's daughter, the descendants of Keryx, who was a son of Hermes and a daughter of the Athenian king, Kekrops, provided the personnel for a very important position in the performance of the Eleusinian Mysteries. This family, appropriately enough, were known as the Kerykes ('Heralds'). It is also in his official capacity as Zeus' Herald that Hermes delivers the divinely wrought sceptre of kingly authority from Zeus' hand to the hands of the mortal Pelops (*Iliad* 2.103–4), indicating the supreme authority of this family's leader among the kings of the earth. Hermes' heraldic role was still appreciated by the second-century ce Roman satirist, Lucian, when he has Hermes serve as Zeus' Herald in *Assembly of the Gods*, in which Hermes is directed to call all the gods to attend an emergency assembly in light of the increasing number of long-established foreign deities and even brand new ones that are being introduced to Greece. Lucian also sends Hermes as Zeus' official spokesperson to deal with a personified 'Philosophy' who has been lodging complaints about some current fraudulent philosophers in *Runaways*.⁵

p.42

Hermes' earthly counterpart, the human Herald, ministered to the ruler (or rulers) of his community in a similar capacity to when Hermes ministered to Zeus from the earliest of times remembered by Homer and Hesiod and for centuries thereafter. Two particular roles in which we see Heralds performing official duties in Homer continued to be enacted by the Heralds from various regions of the Greek-speaking city-states throughout this period: these were convening and overseeing speech in the assembly and the declaring of a war's beginning and its conclusion.⁶

In the context of the Homeric assemblies, it is the Herald who bestows

the right to speak upon a man: each time someone rises before the assembly wishing to address them, he is handed the staff by the Herald. This authority to grant speech to some is balanced, appropriately enough, by the authority to deny it to others. But before anyone can rise to speak in such gatherings, the attendees must be silenced, and it is also the Herald's role to call them to attention. In the *Iliad* we see Athena disguising herself as a Herald and silencing the rowdy crowd to bring the assembly to order (2.279–82), because she has a vested interest in the situation and wants proceedings to get underway.⁷

We also find the human Herald in another context where men are assembled, not in order to make decisions but to enact one already made: when an army goes to war, a Herald for each side is typically envisioned as being present in the companies of the contending warriors, ready to declare the battle open and equally ready to determine when loss has been established. They then have the authority to declare the battle over and to request permission to gather up their own side's dead from the field. Both in peacetime and in times of war, Heralds also served as escorts for the state's official negotiators between interested parties, thus assisting the ones through whom the mediation of potential conflict was conducted or the terms for the resolution of an existing conflict agreed. The rulers and their communities placed a good deal of trust in their official Herald(s) as they carried out their responsibilities on behalf of that community, as under the auspices of the divine Herald, Hermes. As such, their person when performing those duties was considered sacrosanct, granting them an inviolable status for the delivery of important messages or the conduct of official business. Indeed, so sacred were the men serving as official Heralds that to kill one knowingly was punishable by death.⁸

Even when the Athenians adopted democratic rule instead of monarchy or oligarchy, they could not dispense with the important position of the Herald. The Athenian Herald, when he spoke, represented the collective voice of the citizens who had made their decision in the assembly. And although the Athenians did have a chief magistrate, the Herald was not 'his' mouthpiece. The close relationship between Zeus and Hermes as his official spokesman was not inherited by the chief magistrate, because it was a collective voice that now made the official decisions. It is surely significant that even though Athens had rejected the rulership of one in favour of the collective rule of the majority, they did not dispense with the services of the Herald, but rather retained him as the official voice of the majority. Thus, it would be correct to say that, for the fifth-century Athenians, their Herald was the 'Herald of the Athenians.'

While true for them, in the poems composed in the dactylic hexameter

of archaic Greece it is rare, but not unheard of, for Hermes to be referred to as the 'Herald of the gods.' Indeed, such a phrase occurs only twice in Hesiod and not at all in Homer. Nevertheless, in poetic parlance, there is a certain logic in saying that Hermes is the 'Herald of the gods' because the cooperation of the rest of the Olympians is assumed in any decrees of Zeus: Zeus speaks for all the gods, and Hermes speaks as Zeus when on a mission as his Herald. Even so, the relative rarity of this epithet's use with the phrase 'all the gods' suggests a desire to avoid the pairing wherever possible and gives weight to the conceptual differences between a figure acting as messenger and one acting as a Herald.⁹

p.43

When it comes to other poetic genres, Hermes' standing as divine Herald of Zeus is recognised more often than his status as messenger. Thus we find the occasional mention of him as 'Herald of the gods,' as in Pindar's *Olympian* 6 (31-2), an epinician ode celebrating a victor in an athletic event at the Olympian Games. Finding a reference to Hermes in this context is not surprising. Whether it was the debates undertaken in the assembly, the battles fought against enemies or the hard-won victory in an athletic contest, Hermes, via his mortal representative, had a place as the representative of Zeus. The mortal Herald is the figure who announces the winner of each event in the Greeks' sporting competitions, for it was believed that just as Zeus raised up winners in the political arena, so he also did so in the contests of skill, speed and strength to be found in the Games. When Philostratos the Elder is describing the victory of Herakles in his wrestling match with Antaios as it was depicted in a painting (*Imagines* 2.21), he takes the time to note that the painter included the figure of Hermes hastening onto the scene in order to crown Herakles victor: it was in accord with divine will that he won, and Hermes, as Herald, in effect authorises that victory as legitimate by his involvement.¹⁰

Despite the importance of Hermes' offices as messenger and Herald, neither of these is given much attention in tragedy; for instance, in his extant play, *Suppliants* (920), Aeschylus has an Egyptian Herald claim Hermes as his '*proxenos*'; that is, his official protector in a foreign land, presumably because of their shared status as Heralds and because Euripides, in his play entitled *Suppliants*, can acclaim Hermes patron of earthly Heralds (121). It is far more common for the god to be mentioned in relation to his other roles in the Olympian pantheon. The situation is reversed in Attic comedy: Aristophanes clearly makes great play on Hermes' status as both official Herald and more generally messenger of the gods when he makes him a character in *Peace* (424 BCE) and some

twenty-plus years later in *Wealth* (388 BCE). Even the poet of *Orphic Hymn 28 to Hermes* (1), which could be as early as the third century BCE or as late as the third century CE, retains Hermes' status as a messenger of Zeus. A little more than halfway through this time period (first century CE), the Christian Apologist Origen, in ridiculing belief in the Olympians, can assume his audience's familiarity with Hermes as Zeus' spokesperson when he writes, 'the comic poet created laughter in the theatre writing that Zeus woke up and sent Hermes to the Athenians and Spartans' (*Against Celsus* 6.78.6-8): the true target of his ridicule here is the supreme 'pagan' god who can sleep while war is raging on earth. The second-century CE satirist, Lucian, made humorous use of Hermes' status as divine Herald in six of his satires, even placing the precise words of the Athenian Herald's invitation to address the citizens in his *Assembly of the Gods*.¹¹

p.44

In light of this widespread and long-lived recognition of Hermes as divine Herald and messenger, it is all the more surprising that there is no story in which he brings a message to mortals after the Age of Heroes has ended. In no tale, apart from Hermes' encounter with the Old Man in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* and in Alcaeus' earlier sixth-century hymn, does Hermes speak directly to mortal men. These two encounters as recounted in the Hymns occur prior to his official recognition as a god and his incorporation into the ruling family. Once he has been accepted among the Olympians and the Heroes have all passed on, Hermes' engagement with mortals seems to become more covert, manifest 'after the fact' through the interpretation of signs and seemingly 'coincidental' happenings. In light of this, it is not surprising that we have no evidence to suggest that Hermes received cult as a divine messenger *to mortals*. Nevertheless, Hermes did receive cult as the divine Keryx, as did his mortal representatives who were granted a portion of every sacrifice: the tongue of the animal! Indeed, the phrase 'a tongue for the Herald' becomes a commonplace expression which may refer either to a portion dedicated to Hermes as divine patron of the group or the one set apart for the human Herald who officiated at the sacrifice. Apart from this, Hermes does not seem to have received cult as Zeus' spokesperson.¹²

We do have one example of Hermes' 'covert' and indirect interaction with mortals for which he was worshipped at Pharai in Achaia (Pausanias 7.22.3-4). In that town, in the middle of the *agora* (literally, 'gathering place'), there was an oracle of Hermes which involved a rather odd kind of prophetic delivery, known as *klêdônomancy*. The spot was not difficult to find as it was marked by a statue of Hermes of the Herm type, which was

known by the cult title the Whisperer (*Psithyris*). An inquirer would approach the god in the evening and, after burning incense on sacred stone, filling lamps with oil, lighting them and placing a coin on the god's altar, he would whisper the question for which an answer was sought in the god's ear. The inquirer then left the Agora immediately with his ears covered, uncovering them only when he was outside the Agora's perimeter. The first words heard after the uncovering of the ears held the answer to the seeker's question. It is almost as if Hermes is asking his inquirer to become an interpreter like himself – the words intentionally spoken for the ears of someone else are overheard and then understood to have meaning for the speaker's unknown audience.¹³

LEADER OF DREAMS

If words can mean different things to different people, we should not be surprised that the images we see in dreams also require the assistance of an interpreter. The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (4.14–15) explicitly tells us that Hermes is 'the leader of dreams' as well as 'the watcher by night,' and this may well imply that Hermes was engaged in another prophetic enterprise beyond that granted him by his brother in this *Hymn*. In *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (1234–83), the tragic playwright, Euripides, has one of his characters recount a tale involving Apollo's hostile takeover of the oracular site at Delphi, noting that in response, Gaia began to prophesy by sending dreams from below the earth (1234–83; see also *Odyssey* 24.12). After Apollo complained to Zeus that she was cutting into his prophetic prerogative, his father reportedly put a stop to Gaia's activity; however, this does beg the question: if not from Gaia, from whom do the dreams come which Hermes is said to lead? Perhaps for a time, before Apollo complained, Hermes assisted in an alternate form of gaining an insight into divine will. Again there is a certain logic to Hermes having such a role in the delivery of dreams given that he is the only god officially granted the privilege of crossing the boundary between the upper world of the living and the lower realm below. Perhaps this is why the leader of the Phaiacians paid 'Keen-eyed, Argeiphontês' cult before they went to sleep on behalf of his people by pouring their last libation to him (*Odyssey* 7.136–8).¹⁴

We are also told in the *Odyssey* that there are two gates in the underworld through which dreams may pass; one is of hewn ivory, the other of polished horn, and the dreams that exit via the first are empty of meaning, but those that come through the second are true and find

fulfilment (19.562–67). No mention is made of the dreams being led here, but the context in which Penelope is repeating this tale does not require the mechanics of how dreams get from point A to point B to be presented: the emphasis is on the fact that only certain dreams will come true. But as Penelope herself indicates, determining whether one's dream is true or false is not an easy matter. Often the services of an interpreter are required.

It should come as a surprise to learn that a second-century ce author by the name of Artemidoros produced a five-volume collection known as *Oneirokrita* (*On the Interpretation of Dreams*) which allowed readers (or auditors) to learn what different elements in a dream might mean. Rather than being the leader of dreams, when Hermes appears in a dream, he is now a figure to be interpreted. According to Artemidoros, if Hermes appears, this is a good sign for certain professionals, such as those who study oratory or are engaged as athletic instructors and for those who are travelling (2.37.85–95). As Pausanias reports (10.32.3), it was also most favourable when Hermes, along with Herakles and Apollo, appeared in a dream to the magistrates of Themisonion, a city in the region of Phocis, and showed them where to find a cave in which the people could hide themselves from the invading Gauls. So, then, it seems fair to conclude that, despite the reported end of prophetic dreams in Euripides' play, it was still thought possible for night visions to hold prophetic insights and one would assume that those who experienced a particularly vivid dream might well still believe that Hermes played a part in guiding it to them, even if the god was not present in the dream itself.¹⁵

HERMÊNEUS/HERMÊNEUTÊS

Although Hermes may not be an interpreter of dreams himself (either generally or in Artemidoros' guide to their interpretation), he certainly is regarded as the divine interpreter: however, it is only on rare occasions that Hermes speaks directly to mortals with a word from Zeus, and when he does so, he also has to function as both 'translator' or 'interpreter', two ways of understanding the sense of the Greek terms '*hermêneus*' or '*hermêneutês*'. Perhaps one of the side effects of the Promethean trick was the loss of the ability to converse with the gods due to a change in human language: that the gods have different words to mortals for certain things is revealed in the *Odyssey* (10.305), when Odysseus is directed by Hermes to make use of a plant, known to the gods as 'moly', as a charm against the enchantress Kirke's wiles. As Clay observes (1972: 131), the evidence in Homer that there are at least five words unknown to men 'demonstrates that the gods possess a language fuller and richer than the speech of mortals and clearly indicates a sharp boundary between what men and

Plato, the most famous disciple of Sokrates in a dialogue entitled *Kratylos*, has some fun with the name 'Hermes' when trying to explain the relationship between name and essence. Accordingly Sokrates says:

But I should think the name 'Hermes' concerns speech, and to indicate an interpreter (hermêneus) and a messenger and one deceptive in speech and the thievish one and one who does business in the agora; all such occupations as have influence on account of speech. The very thing, then, as I mentioned previously, that 'eirein' indicates is the use of speech, even as Homer in many places says 'emêsato' meaning 'he contrived'. From these two words, then, the lawgiver prescribes the name of the God who invented language and speech for us – eirien means 'speak'; and says: 'Gentlemen, the one who contrived speech would rightly be called Eirhemes'. And now we suppose to have made the name more beautiful, calling him Hermes.

(Kratylos 407e6–408a1)

When Sokrates himself attempts to become an 'interpreter' of the sign-reading and creating god, he becomes as playful in his etymological associations as Hermes himself does with his sideways glances and winks in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*. This is actually the earliest and only reference to Hermes' status as an 'interpreter'. We have to wait for a scholiast commenting on Homer's *Iliad* (5.385) before we again find Hermes associated directly with this office; but at this point the scholiast may well be drawing more on his knowledge of Sokrates' musing in Plato's *Kratylos* than on any sure knowledge of Hermes as holder of this title.

Nevertheless, Hermes' affinity for both the making and interpreting of signs is clearly in evidence in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* and certainly recognised by Apollo. Thus he sees fit to hand over the less prestigious divinatory activities of the Bee-Maidens (552–67), whose behaviour in flight mimics to some extent that of divinatory birds, as a form of (admittedly poor) recompense for his own inability to share the title of oracular god of Delphi with his youngest sibling. In light of this, it makes good sense that lordship over birds of good omen might be granted Hermes as well, given that they provide the sign to mortals that Apollo will answer truly those who follow such birds. We may suspect, although the poet does not say so explicitly here, that reading bird-signs was a part of the prophetic art practised by Apollo prior to gaining lordship over the oracle at Delphi, and giving him oversight of those who interpret such signs is actually giving Hermes a role to play in the prophetic art associated with his shrine. For, according to Allen and Sikes' (1936)

conjectural filling of the apparent lacuna here, Apollo also told Hermes that not all birds serve as avian messengers of divine will (544).

p.47

Not surprisingly, the majestic eagle was Zeus' bird, and its calls and movements through the skies were believed to convey coded information from the chief god. The Fourth *Homeric Hymn* shows Apollo at a loss as to where to find the culprit who stole his cows, suddenly seeing a 'long-winged bird of omen' in flight and recognising it as a sign that the cow-rustler is a child of Zeus (212-14). He can do so because he knows this long-winged bird to be an eagle, his father's avian 'sign'. Such oversight of 'birds of omen' would be most appropriate for a god who becomes 'bird-like' himself when he dons his winged sandals before taking off from Olympus. But it is especially appropriate for a god who is the master communicator and interpreter of signs. Later in the *Hymn*, after Apollo and Hermes have become friends, Apollo passes on lordship over the birds who serve as avian signs of a god's knowledge to Hermes.

A much later tale from the second century ce reports that Hermes had the ability to turn mortals into birds which then served as portents for other mortals (Antonius Liberalis *Metamorphoses* 21), but as this is the only reference we have to the story, we cannot know whether it is a later extension of Hermes' powers or one he has always possessed. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to believe that Hermes is given charge over the birds themselves; that is, he does not direct their calls or flight but rather he is given charge over those whose task it is to interpret bird-signs correctly, the seers, technically called *ornithomancers*: 'bird-seers'. Such an office would certainly be in keeping with Hermes' innate abilities, including his ability to teach.¹⁷

DIDASKALOS

If Hermes is believed to be god who passed on the knowledge of 'bird-signs' to humans, it would be correct to say that Hermes is their *didaskalos*, their 'teacher'. And Hermes' association with teaching does not end with *ornithomancers*. As noted earlier, one of the first things Hermes does in inventing the lyre is to sing the first laudatory 'Hymn' in celebration of his own birth. But this is not his first 'hymn'. In the form of the total greeting given the tortoise by Hermes can be seen a model of the praise-hymn itself. There is the initial greeting followed by a series of epithets by which the addressee's importance both in the world and in the *Hymn to Hermes* is revealed. There follows the petition and the promise to

do something in return that we find in the closing formula of the hymns.¹⁸

The next day, when Hermes is attempting to placate his angry brother who, on seeing the skins of his two cows spread out on the rocks, tries to bind him with strong osier vines (*Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 403–10), the quick-thinking god suddenly presents his newly fashioned lyre and begins to sing what seems to be the first ever theogony (423–8). The Hermes poet tells us not only that he began his song from Mnemosyne ('Memory'), the mother of the divine Muses (429–30), but that he did so because he was of her following. In other words, Hermes has a mind that remembers, and this makes him an excellent choice as the god who must repeat verbatim the words of Zeus or convey a message accurately between two parties. But it also makes him a 'natural' instructor and thus one who has oversight of persons and places involved with learning. He even displays this aptitude for teaching when he offers to instruct his brother how to play the lyre properly in order to produce the most pleasing sounds (475–88).¹⁹

p.48

In light of this, it is not surprising that for the ancient Athenians – the group for which we have the most information – Hermes was made one of three gods who oversaw the education and training of young boys and adolescents in the formal settings of the *gymnasion* (exercise ground) and *palaistra* (wrestling ground). As the names suggest, these two spaces were deeply involved in the training of the body (see [Chapter 3](#)); however, the ancient Greeks did not make such a great distinction between physical and mental education: the latter was essential to the former. This is particularly evidenced by the importance given to music and dance in the course of a teen's formal education.

If an adolescent's education continued beyond learning the 'three Rs', as they used to be called – reading, (w)riting and (a)rithmetic – he could be taught *mousika* and *gymnastica*. *Mousika* (music) involved far more than learning to play a musical instrument, although this was a significant aspect of the training. A youth was also taught to sing and made to memorise the works of various poets in different poetic genres. Most important of all was learning to recite large parts (or all) of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by heart. In addition, because poetry involved metres (or rhythms), he was also taught to dance, especially in a synchronised group. Learning to dance in formation, to sing and to play a stringed instrument were important skills in both religious worship and the celebration of the city, and thus in the integration of its youngest members; however, unlike music education today, the young student had to learn music by ear,

without the aid of written texts. By learning different musical and lyric styles and being able to accompany himself or someone else in a performance, a youth gained the skills to participate in and carry forward a highly important part of Athenian social practice.²⁰

In the century following the institution of Hermes, Herakles and Eros as the official gods of the *gymnasion*, the poet Kallimachos could write, 'We ask for enthusiasm in learning the gift of Hermes' (*Iambi* Fragment 21), clearly acknowledging Hermes' role in the acquisition of knowledge with understanding, with the implication that such a blessing from Hermes would be recognised by his auditors and readers as a 'natural' benefit to be sought from the god. Possibly contemporaneous with Kallimachos is the twelve-verse *Orphic Hymn 28 to Hermes* where the singer praises Hermes for a goodly number of his skills, before praying, 'Hear me, Hermes . . . of various discourse . . . the fearsome weapon of the tongue revered by mortals . . . Hear me I pray, and grant grace in speech and in memorization' (verses 1, 8, 10, 12).

Hermes' association with the acquisition of knowledge and even with wisdom seems to grow even stronger from the Hellenistic period of Kallimachos down to the time of the Roman Empire, when Philostratos, an author of the second sophistic composing in Attic Greek, could write when speaking of those who sought wisdom:

Many others came to Hermes asking for the same [and offered him rich presents] . . . Now when they arrived on the day specified for distribution of wisdom, inasmuch as Hermes is the god of eloquence, erudition and gain, to him whose dedication was without doubt the largest, he said, 'You may have philosophy'; and 'You may take your place amongst the orators', to the one who was second in generosity; and 'for you, the field of astronomy' and 'for you, music' and 'you, the heroic metre of epic' and 'you, iambs'.

(Life of Apollonius of Tyana 5.15.1–2)

p.49

We note here that apart from supporting Hermes' standing as a god responsible for the dispensation of wisdom to mortals, there is a correlation shown between inborn sensibilities and the esteem associated with the knowledge received from the god: those who had the innate sense to offer him greater and more prestigious gifts received the highest-ranking intellectual abilities in return! But there may just be a catch: our author does not think very highly of either the philosophers or the orators of his day, which suggests that he does not think very highly of the god who presides over these arts either. Nevertheless, even if there is a note of tongue-in-cheek mockery here, its significance as an expression of the

skills believed to be Hermes' to oversee and dispense is informative.

RHETOR (ORATOR)

Philostratos' observations bring us back to the god of most, if not all, forms of communication, but especially the spoken word. Thus, included in Philostratos' list of recipients of gifts from Hermes are a group of men for whom respect ran both hot and cold: the orators. As this author's rather late evidence indicates, by the second century of the Roman Empire, Hermes was already well established as the god of orators as well as the other verbal arts. But we do have some evidence to suggest that his association with oratory dates back to at least the fourth century BCE at Athens, if not earlier. In the work by Plato, an Athenian disciple of Sokrates dating from the early 300s BCE mentioned earlier, the author offered an etymological explanation of Hermes' name that associated him closely with those who 'interpret' as well as 'all such occupations as have influence through speech' (407e): this would place orators among those who come under Hermes' patronage. It is not surprising, then, that in his capacity as Patron of Orators, Hermes become known by the epithet 'Logios' meaning 'of authoritative Speech' (Luraghi 2009). Hermes is 'natural' in a legal context because, as the most recent commentator on the *Hermes Hymn* observes (Richardson 2010: 20), this young god is 'the master of persuasive rhetoric and special pleading'. So famous did this appreciation of Hermes become that a Roman of the late first century BCE by the name of Marcellus the Younger was immortalised in the pose of the god giving a speech, now known as 'Marcellus as Hermes Logios' by the Athenian sculptor Kleomemos; the stance was reportedly based on an earlier statue of Hermes standing with his right arm raised as if gesturing while speaking and his left lowered and draped with a cape.²¹

At the time Plato was writing, many intellectuals had grown weary of public speakers who had been trained by Sophists in the persuasive use of oral communication. In this regard Hermes' acknowledged verbal virtuosity and cleverness became a cause for suspecting those with oratorical training of concealing self-serving motives behind their fine speech. But there is no need to suppose that Hermes' relationship with and lordship over language use (and misuse) was a relatively new attribute of the god to emerge only in the fifth to fourth centuries BCE. As Hesiod well understood in the seventh century, Hermes was the master of language and its use in the Greek pantheon. This brings us right back to the Prometheus story with which we began and the further repercussions that his failed attempt to deceive Zeus had for mortal men.

After ‘tricking’ Zeus into taking the inedible portion of the sacrifice, Zeus withheld fire from mortals so that the cooking of their wonderful meat was impossible. This led Prometheus to intervene on behalf of humanity a second time by ascending to Olympus and stealing fire from Hephaistos and Athena. It was in recompense for this action that Zeus decided to respond in kind by designing a beautiful deception for Prometheus’ brother, Epimetheus, and the rest of mortal men. He called upon all the gods to contribute to the creation of the first woman, and from Hermes in particular he asked that he give her the ability to think and speak. Hesiod tells us that Hermes ‘the guide, Argeiphontês, in her breast formed falsehoods, and mischievous words and a wily nature, in accord with the will of loud-thundering Zeus’ (*Works and Days* 77–80). What is more, still in keeping with his father’s will, Hermes gave her language and then gave this new creature her name, Pandora (80–2). By Plato’s day it is as if the orators were, in effect, the male equivalents of Pandora, whose ‘seductive’ speech led men astray (from the perspective of the poet, at least). In light of this, it is intriguing to observe that Hermes’ gift for seductive speech is on par with his lyrical and musical abilities, as can be seen when Apollo is filled with desire by Hermes’ song in a manner often attributed to the emotional allure of beautifully crafted speech: whether rhetorician or musician, Hermes has a natural way with words, which is only enhanced by his instrumental virtuosity. Lucian again makes great play with this in *Dialogues of the Gods* 11 (14.5–6), where Apollo is complaining to Hephaistos about Hermes’ innate musical abilities: ‘He plays so smoothly and harmoniously, Hephaistos, that I’m jealous since I’ve been practising on the kithara for ages’.

A final word on Hermes’ aptitude for languages sounds an even sourer note than does the tale of his endowments to Pandora, and although it comes from a late source, it certainly fits with observations already made on Hermes’ facility with language and its transmission. According to this report in one of Pseudo-Hyginus’ *Fables* (143), Hermes was allegedly the creator of the various languages spoken by men, which resulted in a discordant breach in relations between language groups. Being unable to understand each other gave rise to suspicions, which subsequently escalated into conflicts. This last observation is an extrapolation from Pseudo-Hyginus’ comment that Hermes’ confusion of the languages ‘was not pleasing to Zeus’. Clearly this ‘gift’ of Hermes was not a boon for mortals; however, it did create an excellent opportunity for him to showcase his skills as an interpreter and to offer his expert services and train others in this skill so that they might be able to resolve misunderstanding through translation.²²

As we have seen in this chapter, Hermes is the great ‘transmitter’ of the Greek pantheon, the god deliberately planned and produced by Zeus to convey his demands to both gods and men. From the earliest of our written evidence to material written in Latin by first to fifth-century ce poets, Hermes operates under five titles while performing activities associated with the transmission of information: Herald, Messenger, Interpreter, Instructor and Orator. He also takes a particular interest in the human figures who are engaged in these activities in the mortal realm, in some cases even serving as their patron deity. Additionally, in keeping with Hermes’ activities in the delivery of messages, he was also believed to be the conductor of dreams; but whether these are dreams sent forth by Gaia or from some Olympian source, the Hymn does not tell us. In any event, this honour helps to fill out Hermes’ *curriculum vitae* as god of communication, the great transmitter of Zeus’ transmissions.

p.51

NOTES

- 1 The only identifier to precede this epithet phrase is the Hymnist’s naming of him as ‘Lord of Kyllene and Arcadia rich in flocks’ (2), indicating that the singer will tell the story of *this* Hermes as opposed to any other story associated with the god’s birth at Thebes or Tanagra.
- 2 Because of the differing metrical requirements of epic, lyric, tragic and comic poetry, it was sometimes necessary to use *angelos* rather than *keryx*, even though Hermes is on a mission as Zeus’ official spokesman. The inverse also applies when Hermes is called *keryx* but is clearly not carrying an ‘official’ communication from Zeus.
- 3 For more on the messenger in Athenian tragedies see Barrett (2002). There is an interesting correspondence between Iris (a term also used for a rainbow) as messenger of Zeus and the ancient Israelite understanding of the rainbow as a message from God – in this case a reminder that He would not flood the earth again.
- 4 It is worth emphasising here that in specifying Zeus and the Underworld gods, the rest of the Olympians are excluded: by implication, none of the other Olympians have the authority to issue such unquestionable commands to one another.
- 5 On the importance of the Kerykes in the Mysteries see Clinton (1974, 1979, 2004). For Eleusinian imagery, see Leventi (2007) and Harrison (2000).
- 6 These are not the only two contexts in which a Herald performs official duties on behalf of those who rule. Other areas where the Herald is a person of importance will be discussed when considering Hermes’ relationship with transactions ([Chapter 4](#)).
- 7 Here, it is not Agamemnon himself who addresses the crowd, but Odysseus. Even so, his words have the same force as would Agamemnon’s because Odysseus is holding the latter’s *skeptron* when he puts forth his directives (2.279). This would be an instance of one of the three noted by Mondì (1980: 208) wherein the King would yield his sceptre to another ‘speaker *only* when the authority of the king himself is placed

in the speaker's words'. The other two instances in which the king would pass on his sceptre involve the Herald serving as the king's proxy and the 'dispensation of *dike*' ('judgement', among other senses).

- 8 Pausanias (3.12.7) mentions the penalties paid by those who killed two Persian Heralds sent by King Darios; see Sealey (1976) for discussion.
- 9 According to an ancient scholar called a 'scholiast' who was writing on a line in Pindar's *Nemean Ode* (2.16), Hesiod called Hermes 'the Herald of the gods' in the *Astronomy*, a work which now exists only in fragments; this comment may be found in what is now known as 'Fragment 1' of that work.
- 10 A fragment from Aeschylus' lost tragedy, *Glaucus of Potniai*, has Hermes being addressed as '*Angleos* of Zeus' in a hymn to the god sung by the play's chorus; see Henderson (2008: 270–1).
- 11 In *Prometheus Bound*, a play attributed to Aischylos, Hermes appears as Zeus' official representative, bearing a warning to the play's namesake to relent and tell Zeus what he wants to know or receive even harsher punishment: Prometheus insults Hermes by calling him a mere 'lackey' of Zeus (966). For Lucian, see also *Downward Journey* 23; *Lives for Sales* 1–2, 12; *Runaways* 26; *Tragic Zeus* 6; *Twice Accused* 4.

p.52

- 12 See, for instance, Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 515, *Choephoroi* 165; Aristophanes, *Peace* 1060; *Birds* 1705. The evidence for the awarding of 'tongues' is far from clear: See Kadletz (1981) for an argument denying the assignment of tongues to Heralds and priests and compare with Gill (1991).
- 13 Usener (1904: 166) argued that we should understand Hermes' title here as 'the Whispered to', seemingly in light of the fact that it was the inquirer who whispered and not the god. This is rejected by Brown (1969: 16).
- 14 For a study of Hermes' association with dreams, see Brillante (1990).
- 15 He is also good for those engaged in import/export and weights and measures (see Chapter 4) but a negative sign for those who are ill (see Chapter 5).
- 16 See Clay (1972) for discussion of the language difference between gods and mortals; she gives these five terms in god-speak as *nectar*, *ambrosia*, *ichor*, *Planktai* and *moly*.
- 17 There is some debate as to whether the prophetic method given to Hermes is a lot-oracle formerly used at Delphi or the 'Bee Oracle' of the *Hymn*, which seems to involve the interpretation of either the 'hum' or the flight pattern of the bees. See Robbins (1916) for the original statement of the argument. Hermes' lordship over certain birds is based on some editors' comments on a damaged part of the manuscript containing the *Hymns*. There are two lacunae (places where lines seem to be missing) in the text. The earliest twentieth-century editors of the Greek text believed there to be a lacuna just as the remainder of Hermes' offices are being granted at line 567, so they filled it with two lines in which Hermes also received charge of these winged messengers of the skies, as did Allen, Halliday and Sikes (1963) who retain the 1904 conjecture for dealing with the supposed lacuna. This suggestion for the content of the missing lines has not been accepted by the most recent editor and translator of the new volume (West 2003: 158–9); furthermore, Richardson (2010: 222–3), the editor of the most recent commentary in English, rejects the lacuna altogether and with it any suggestion that Hermes ever had charge of birds of omen and those who interpreted their calls and movements.

- 18 Later on, as we shall see, Hermes proceeds to establish not only the ritual components of the feast and other related aspects of the *xenia* (guest/host) relationship, but even the occasions for gift-giving as well.
- 19 Pausanias (9.5.4) knows of a tale in which Hermes also teaches Amphion how to play the lyre.
- 20 We know that Sparta also placed a high value on their youths learning to recite (or sing) the words of their highly respected poets, although we have no evidence to suggest that compositional skills themselves were highly valued.
- 21 For an early expression of concern over oratory and rhetorical deception, see Yunis (1996: 94–5). See also Knudson (2012) for further discussion of Hermes’ rhetorical skills.
- 22 On the often deep suspicion in which ‘real-world’ translators and bi- or multi-lingual interpreters were held, see Mairs (2011).



3

TRANSITIONS

The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* is our starting point again for a consideration of how this god comes to be one of the primary deities honoured in contexts involving the movement of persons and things through space and time. As is clear from the *Hymn*, Hermes is the consummate traveller with an innate ability to find his way from 'A' to 'B' and back again, and as such he is able to guide and direct others in their journeying as well. However, the *Hymn* is far from the only evidence available for consideration in coming to an appreciation of the god's involvement in the areas of life associated with transitions. Just as today, movement through life may be styled as a journey and various ages viewed as points of transition at which one changes one's status from young to old, from child to teenager to adult, from single to married, and from living to dead. For the ancient Greeks, Hermes was the god involved in each of these temporal transitions as well as the one who guided and sometimes accompanied a person as he or she journeyed through physical space.¹

DIVINE GUIDE

As the *Hymn* indicates, Hermes has an innate ability to find his way in the world without guidance of any kind: he emerges within hours of his birth from his mother's isolated cave and makes his way to distant Pieria without any assistance whatsoever. Finding the cows he is seeking, he then leads them back to a cave by the Alpheios, a place quite some distance removed from his birth-cave, and then makes his way home in the dark. Later, when Apollo is threatening to do him bodily harm if he fails to return the cows, Hermes offers to lead his older brother to Olympus and eventually does so – another place he has never been before – and once their dispute has been settled in front of their father, Zeus

determines that Hermes should be the one to lead his brother back to the place where he left Apollo's cows. With their dispute settled, it is Hermes again who takes the lead, as together he and Apollo drive the cows back to their grazing ground on Pieria's slopes. In other words, Hermes is a mobile god, one who seems to take pleasure in being 'on the move' and not the least bit discouraged by any potential obstacles in his way, such as rivers and mountains. Hermes can make his way across anything.

In other *Homeric Hymns* Hermes is also the god who leads or guides a fellow god to his or her appointed place. There are many tales in which Hermes has been commissioned by Zeus to lead some mortal or god to some unknown location in order to have an often unexpected encounter with someone or something. Thus in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, when the goddess herself wants to create a convincing 'cover story' to explain her sudden appearance before the attractive Trojan mortal whom she desires, namely Anchises, she avails herself of Hermes' famous reputation as a guide. She tells Anchises that Hermes interrupted her while she was dancing in a chorus of young girls and led her away only to abandon her again at her present location. Anchises accepts this explanation, in part because it sounds like something Hermes would do. It is also Hermes whom Zeus directs to lead the three goddesses – Hera, Athena and Aphrodite – to an encounter with the Trojan shepherd boy, Paris (who is, in truth, the abandoned prince of Troy, Alexander), because he is the mortal ordained by Zeus to serve as the judge of a beauty pageant among these three goddesses (Figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1 'The Judgement of Paris', Berlin painter, mid-fifth century BCE

Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany / Johannes Laurentius / Art Resource, NY

This encounter was such a popular incident that Pausanias reports seeing a depiction of Hermes leading the three goddesses to Paris carved in low relief on the famous Chest of Kypselos at Corinth (5.19.1). The fifth-century BCE comic playwright, Kratinos, when he staged his version of what has become known as 'the Judgement of Paris', had to include Hermes as the divine guide of the goddesses. Indeed, so firmly established was this guiding role for Hermes that even in the second century ce it is retained by the satirical author, Lucian, who has Charon, the ferryman of souls across the infernal lake in the underworld, seek out the assistance of Hermes when he wants to go on a guided tour of the world above ground to see what it is like. In the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (262–3) it is noted that Hermes is particularly partial to 'mixing in love' with nymphs, typically in grottos, and in art he is often depicted as the leader of a group of nymphs, typically three.²

In the context of cult, Hermes was the god Zeus called upon to guide Persephone back to the upper world from Hades' realm after successfully persuading him to allow her return. He was depicted in reliefs of this

momentous event at Eleusis, as was his offspring, Keryx, who served as the first mortal guide and *dadouchos* ('torch-bearer') in the rite commemorating Persephone's initial return. But as noted previously, Hermes was not solely the guide of his fellow divinities; he was known to have served in this capacity for mortals of the heroic age as well. His guidance of ancient heroes was reported from the early archaic period through the first centuries of the new millennium and beyond. In the *Iliad*, Hermes agrees to guide Priam, King of Troy, under cover of darkness into the Greek camp of Achilles, in order to ransom the body of his deceased son, Hektor (24.333ff), and then to accompany him a safe distance back again (23.679ff). This event was popular enough for Aischylos to convert it into a tragedy called *Hektor's Ransom* where Hermes played his guiding role as Priam's escort. So well established was Hermes' divine assistance as guide to Priam at Troy that, like the 'Judgement of Paris,' Pseudo-Hyginus, in his *Fabulae* 106, could not mention the encounter between Priam and Achilles without noting Hermes' contribution to the event. Indeed, so conventional was this aspect of Hermes' divinity that Sophokles has his chorus in *Electra* report that they can see Hermes leading Ares and a mortal contingent of two men, Pylades and Orestes, into the latter's ancestral home for the purpose of taking vengeance on his father's murderer, Aigisthos – an action the chorus wholly endorse. Apollodoros (*Bibliothēke* 2.37) knows that Hermes, together with Athena, served as guide to Perseus in his quest to get the head of the Gorgon Medusa as well as in his rescue of Andromeda from the sea monster. There is also a report of Hermes being the first god to deal face-to-face with mortals in what may be a late tale attributed to Aesop. In *Fables* 522 (Gibbs, ed.) it is recorded that at Zeus' direction, Hermes guided the very first humans to Ge ('earth') and introduced them for the purposes of gaining Ge's cooperation in obtaining food from the ground. As Lonsdale (1993: 121) observes, there is a correlation between leading of a chorus, an army and a city which had already been recognised by Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 3.4.3–6) and which drew upon the relationship between herder and herded.³

Nevertheless, just as was the case for Hermes in his role as Olympos' divine messenger, reports of direct human encounters with Hermes as *Pompaios* ('Guide' or 'Leader') ceased with the death of the last heroes. This means that we have no extant evidence that Hermes was worshipped specifically as the Divine Guide of Mortals; however, we might consider all Herms, including the three-headed Hermes Herms, as a way to indicate belief in his continuing, though invisible, guidance of mortals through unfamiliar or dangerous territory. The very fact that a three-headed Herm, called *Trikephalos*, existed indicates the veneration of the god in some capacity, but what?

PROTECTOR OF PERSONS

As Hermes is an especially mobile god, it should follow that he would be particularly fond of other creatures which spend a good deal of their time on the move. The *Trikephalos* Herms were similar to those erected by the Athenian tyrant, Hipparchos, insofar as they had information about the distance to a particular place engraved on the flat surfaces of their columns. It would seem that each of Hermes' three faces looked in the direction in which the next town lay, serving as a guide to the traveller who may not have been familiar with the route. Additionally, in offering such directions, Herms of this sort also served the purpose of protecting the traveller as he journeyed, not only from going kilometres (or miles) in the wrong direction, but by serving as the travellers' unseen protector.

Perhaps not surprisingly these *trikephalos* Herms were typically found at the intersection of three roads or foot-paths, where a person would need to choose between two possible routes. Such locations were also where one would be likely to encounter an altar to Hekate, as she became known as the goddess of crossroads (von Rudloff 1999). But Herms were not limited to such intersections and were frequently placed at various points along a road or path for a variety of reasons. One such purpose would be to indicate a place where fresh water was available for drinking.

Our evidence for Hermes' protection of travellers comes especially from a collection of epigrams in which the god is represented as a speaking Herm, inviting the weary traveller to pause and take rest in the shade of the tree under which he has been set up and to refresh himself with water from the nearby fountain. Such is the content of *Epigram* 16.277 by an anonymous author. Another Herm (Anonymous 16.254), in an ironic nod to the Herms of Hipparchos with their pithy moral saying and statement of how far it is to the Altar of the Twelve Gods in the Athenian *Agora*, acknowledges that he does not really have much to offer those who contribute to his pile of stones save knowledge of how far they have to go till they reach Goat fountain. The reference to the adding of another stone to the pile indicates that this was an act of worship in return for which the god gave assistance to the traveller, and from which we may speculate that such an act was the typical way of thanking the god when travelling.⁴

It has frequently been argued that the original 'Herm' was just such a pile of stones and, as was noted when introducing Hermes, such Herms were often used as boundary markers. From a Herm in its more stylised form we have one epigram by Hermokreon (16.11) which does double

duty, first reporting that it is a boundary stone set up to guard the owner's cattle and land and then going on to invite the traveller to sit under the plane tree and take his rest. In contrast with the subtle cautionary welcome of Hermokreon's Herm, Leonidas of Tarentum's Herm names himself Hermes *Episkopos* ('Overseer'), reports that he has been set up to guard a flock of sheep and then advises the traveller that his sheep have no need to be concerned about 'the thieving wolf' (16.19), a double-entendre, perhaps, suggesting that he is protector of the sheep from all predators, be they four-legged or two – just in case the passer-by had any thoughts of 'rustling up' a meal! This Herm speaks to the fact that, as the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* revealed, Hermes has lordship over animals, both domesticated and predatory and, as such, is their divine protector as well.

p.57

Not surprisingly, then, even the Hellenistic poet Theokritos, a poet credited with creating bucolic poetry (that is, poems set in a rural, sparsely inhabited landscape of groves, little streams and pasture lands), can use Hermes' lordship over grazing animals and those who tend them to make him the father of a rustic Sicilian shepherd by the name of Daphnis in his first *Idyll*. Additionally, Hermes' protective oversight of both mortals and animals is acknowledged in another of his poetic epithets found in Homer: *Euskopos*, 'keen-sighted'. Not much gets past Hermes unless he wants it to. So it is not surprising to find that we have several images of a Herm being offered a libation or garlanded in thanks for the god's assistance in some activity, most notably by hunters. And this was appropriate, for as lord of all manner of animals, whether one has a successful hunt may well depend on whether Hermes is well disposed towards you.⁵

PROTECTOR OF PLACES

Much as can be found today when travelling through a country, boundaries of provinces and states are typically indicated by road signs saying 'You are now leaving X', quickly followed by another sign saying, 'Welcome to Y'. National boundaries are usually more formally marked by border-crossing guards on the roads leading from one nation-state into another. But such was not the case in ancient Greece. At the macro-level of the city-state, Herms were used to mark the existence of territorial boundaries and Pausanias makes note of several of these as he journeys through Greece. For instance, a Herm on the road he is travelling appears at the boundary between the Lakonian and Argolid territories. Conveniently, as Pausanias tends to divide his books in conjunction with

territories, this Herm receives double mention, being used to mark a break between two books in his travels (2.38.7, 3.1.1). On the island of Krete, Hermes' status as border guard was honoured not through the erections of Herms, but by sanctuaries dedicated to him: four of these have been located (Chaniotis 1988).⁶

But Hermes' status as a protective god did not end with his oversight of those who were long-distance travellers, whether for business, pleasure or while on the hunt: he was also a protector of those settled within houses and city walls within those larger territories. Sometimes his protection even extended over the entire population of the city, as was the case for the city of Ainos in Thrace. This was a territory which had been colonised by the Greeks, and we find that by the mid-fifth century (if not earlier), the city of Ainos accepted Hermes as their patron god, placing an image of him on their coins sitting on a throne. Kallimachos (Pfeifer, frag. 197) provides the aetiology of his cult in this city: while at work one day, some of the city's fishermen hauled up a roughly hewn wooden log. After several attempts to break it apart, they came to the realisation that it was divine, and at the direction of Apollo's oracle, they established the worship of this wooden image of Hermes in their city. The story attached to this image claims that it was first carved by Epeios, famed as the maker of the great Wooden Horse, with which the Greeks took Troy. The people of Ainos venerated it as Hermes *Perpheraios*, which suggests that it was ritually carried around the city (*peri* = around; *phero* = carry) so that the god might either shed his protective power over it or dispense his beneficent blessing among its inhabitants. Alternately, the title may be translated as 'passed around' as from man-to-man. We might surmise, if this is the action underlying the name, that because the fishermen who found the statue each tried to break it apart, now each citizen of Ainos demonstrates his care and respect for Hermes so as to receive blessings in return for himself and his family.⁷

p.58

In the territory of Hermes' birth, we find both a town and its hill named Akakesion, reportedly after Hermes' *epiklesis*, *akakêa* ('unpolluted', 'inviolable'); it was here, Pausanias tells us, that the cult of Hermes *Akakêa* was celebrated (8.30.6). We can gauge the importance of this cult for the local inhabitants by the fact that when the various towns in the region were amalgamated in the mid-fourth century, all of the cults deemed important to the new city of Megalopolis were transplanted to it, including the cult of Hermes from Akakesion. Neither Pausanias nor any other ancient source tells us how Hermes was venerated in either location, but we know that in Megalopolis he did have a temple, as

Pausanias reports that by the time he visited the ancient city, the temple was in ruins: all that remained was a stone tortoise (8.30.6). Nevertheless, given that he had a temple, it is highly likely that in this city he received a blood sacrifice of the Olympian kind. These sacrifices typically involved the ritual killing of a specific type of animal on an altar in the forecourt outside the temple doors, and in line with the cult statue of the god within, permitting him (or her) to preside over and view the proceedings from within the temple.⁸

Elsewhere Pausanias observes that the countryside of Arkadia was peppered with small shrines and Herms, especially in border areas between towns and between the other territories surrounding the region: this fits well with the epithet used of Hermes in the second verse of the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*, where he is called ‘guardian’ or ‘ruler’ (*medeonta*) not only of Kyllene but of all Arkadia. Strabo (*Geography* 8.343) goes even further, observing that the entire region through which the Alpheus flows was awash with roadside shrines belonging to Hermes. This practice again serves as a reminder of the relationship between the god and boundaries (and their protection) noted previously, which may have been linked with Hermes’ offices as patron of herds (and of exchange; see [Chapter 4](#)) as well as with the ithyphallic nature of his Herms. Even a cursory glance at the references to Hermes in Pausanias’ *Guide to Greece* indicates that these Herms were commonly found at intersections and boundaries, both urban and rural, throughout the territories associated with the modern state of Greece.

The cites of Arkadia, in particular, seem to have given some individual attention to Hermes in their cycle of sacred festivals; however, he was not honoured as often as several of the other Olympians with public celebrations dedicated solely to him in cities outside of Arkadia. Nevertheless, in the same way as many cities and individuals set up Herms in the countryside to indicate boundaries and important intersections, many also sanctioned the establishment of Herms within the city to mark such places of significance within their own walls. At Athens, we hear of a very old wooden Herm situated right next to the entrance to the Temple of Athena on the Acropolis (Pausanias 1.27.1), in addition to a building known as the Stoa of the Herms at the northwest corner of the *Agora*, which contained several privately dedicated, though publicly approved, Herms and those Herms set up to demarcate the boundaries of the *Agora*. A Herm situated in the forecourt of a Temple had the cult *epiklesis*, *Pronaos*, literally ‘before the temple’; if the god were set up by one of the city’s main gates, he was typically Hermes *Propylaios*, ‘before the gate.’ As we have no record of these statues receiving Olympian-style animal sacrifice, it is highly probable that the form of worship given them consisted in libations and prayers from individuals

The importance of these street-side Herms for the city and its inhabitants is very well expressed in the reaction of the Athenian populace to their discovery that all the city's Herms had been defaced while they slept on an early summer's evening in 415 BCE. The historian Thucydides reports that the people viewed this attack against the god as an attack against the democratic political system then operating at Athens (6.27); however, he does not reveal why people jumped to that conclusion. Scholars have been quick to offer suggestions, the most popular being that Hermes was the god of the lower classes; that is, the largest segment of the population to support the rule (literally, 'power') of the people (*dêmo* = people + *kratos* = power). There were, however, other reasons for the people to be concerned with a display of such impiety against the god: Hermes was a god of contests, and the Athenians were within days of setting out on one of the biggest 'contests' of the Peloponnesian War – an attack on Sicily. It would have been terribly difficult to ask the god who protected travellers and oversaw the bestowal of *kudos* (very roughly, 'glory') on a victor to look favourably on the citizens of Athens after such a blatant display of disregard for the god's honour.¹⁰

We also know that at Athens, and probably in a number of other Greek cities, just as Herms were set up at key entry points into the city proper and its sacred buildings, so too were they positioned at important points of entry into an individual's property. The Fourth *Homeric Hymn* (15) calls Hermes *pulêdokon*, 'receiver at the door' or 'doorman', which may be an otherwise unattested *epiklesis* for the Herms located on the inside of exterior, private doors. Although these Herms may well have been full-sized, there is some evidence to suggest they were smaller versions of the civic Herms set up by Hipparchos, placed either in recessed alcoves beside the door on the exterior wall of a house, or carved into the wall itself in low relief in the same position as one would place the alcove for the Herm. An ancient scholar commenting on a line in one of Aristophanes' comedies (*Wealth* 1153) notes that these Herms had the *epiklesis*, *Strophaios*, meaning 'of the hinge'. The doorway, even with its door closed, continues to represent a place of passage through which both persons and things might move (or be moved), legitimately or otherwise. As the 'watcher at the door', Hermes' role as guardian deity is exploited for a laugh by Lucian in *Dialogue of the Gods* 12 (1ff.), when he attempts to keep Poseidon away from Zeus, and is similarly exploited by Aristophanes in *Peace*, where he is left behind to guard whatever is left of the gods' possessions on Olympus after the rest of them have fled. Menippus, a

character in Lucian's dialogue, *Ikaromenippos*, also encounters Hermes at the threshold of Olympus.¹¹

PROTECTOR OF PROPERTY

Hermes' placement in front of temple portals and at entries to private dwellings, while signalling his protection of the place, also signalled protection of the property beyond the threshold at which he was placed. Comments made in the Homeric *Hymn to Hestia* attest to the importance of his positioning there, especially in the private home. In fact, the comments made about friendship that existed between Hermes and Hestia in that *Hymn* motivated Vernant to look more closely at the religious concepts underlying this relationship. Given that Hestia (whose name is also the word for 'hearth' in Greek) is the virgin goddess of the family (and civic) hearth, she is for all intents and purposes unmovable and immobile. Vernant postulated that were she the sole guardian of the home, her conservative and preservative nature would mean that the household would stagnate, as nothing could go out. In order for the home to survive and thrive, Hestia needs to know that the home has protection when engaging with the outside world. So Hermes becomes its threshold guardian, helping Hestia protect and conserve what the family has, one who stands over the movement of goods out of the house in the form of exchanges, which ensures that the family is not diminished by such movement. The same protective function applied to the placement of his Herms along the boundaries of a city-state's territory, and those of a farmer's field.

p.60

As was noted in the Introduction, Hesiod knew Hermes as a god who worked together with Hekate to increase the herds and flocks of animals (*Theogony* 444-5) on which humans depended for sustenance as well as for other by-products made from the inedible remains of the animal. Homer (*Iliad* 14.491-2) rehearses Hermes' relationship with both mortal and animal when he reports that a certain Trojan, by the name of Phorbas, is called 'rich in flocks' because he is loved by Hermes, who favoured him with ever-increasing stock. So at least as early as the eighth century BCE, it was generally accepted that Hermes was one of the gods to whom you would pray for an increase in your stock's productivity. It comes as no surprise, then, when we find just this honour being granted to Hermes in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* to the god. In conversation with Apollo, Hermes says to his half-brother:

I will give you this lyre, glorious son of Zeus, while I for my part will graze down with wild-roving cattle the pastures on hill and horse-feeding plain: so shall the cows covered by the bulls calve abundantly both males and females.

(490–4)

Here Hermes clearly indicates that he will oversee the productivity of cattle; however, his patronage is not just over the multiplication of animals, for:

After saying this, [Hermes] held it [the lyre] out, and Phoibos Apollo received it; and willingly placed in his [Hermes'] hand his shining switch [whip], and ordained him the caretaker of herds.

(496–8)

Shortly thereafter, as the *Hymn* is drawing to its close, the singer tells us that in addition to the cattle and their oversight granted him by Apollo, Hermes was made guardian of horses and mules, indeed all animals that move in herds, flocks and packs, both wild and domestic, as well as all flocking birds (567–71). It is for very good reason, then, that many scholars have seen in Hermes a 'Master of Animals' figure complementary to the goddess Artemis, who is generally recognised as the Greek 'Mistress of Animals'. In light of this, it is most appropriate to find that Hermes has a poetic epithet acknowledging his association with animal husbandry: *Oiopolos* refers to his oversight of sheep, meaning 'sheep-tending'; it was so common that the comic poet Aristophanes could make reference to it in his *Thesmophoriazusae* (*Women celebrating the Thesmophoria*, 977), when he has a chorus of women say: 'I also pray to Hermes, the god of those who tend sheep, and Pan'.¹²

p.61

In addition to this poetic epithet, Hermes was worshipped under the *epikleses*, *Epimēlios*, 'keeper of the flocks' (Pausanias 9.43.2) and *Kriophoros* 'ram-bearer'. These associations passed down through the centuries with Hermes well into late antiquity. So generally accepted was the first that Philostratos can make use of it to explain 'Aesop's rather meagre offering' to Hermes. He reports that being a poor shepherd seeking to advance himself, Aesop used to pour out for Hermes as much milk as a sheep would yield in a single milking, and place on his altar a honeycomb of such a size as to fit in his hand, and would set before the god a few roses or violets and perhaps some myrtle berries, and say, 'Must I, O Hermes, plait garland [for you] and be neglectful of my sheep?' (*Life of Apollonios of Tyana* 5.15).

Clearly, Aesop assumes that the god will appreciate his worshipper's concern for the animals in his care, disregard the meagreness of the offering and fulfil his request. The basis for this continued acceptance of Hermes as lord over animals, especially stock animals, may well be attributed to the continuing engagement with Homeric material. So well versed in Homer were the expected readers of Philostratos and Pausanias that the latter could call upon Homer's comment on Phrobas (*Iliad* 14.489–91, which he paraphrases) when he encounters a bronze statue of a seated Hermes with a ram at his side (Pausanias 2.3.4) to explain the significance of the ram. Pausanias also says that he knows the story told in the Mysteries about Hermes and the ram but he will not repeat it. Clearly, he was an initiate himself, and his reticence to retell the story suggests that it was among the secrets that initiates were sworn not to reveal to the uninitiated. He does, however, repeat another tale involving Hermes and a ram when he reaches the town of Boiotian Tanagra, which occurred in the distant past and became the basis for a festival in honour of Hermes there.¹³

The people of Tanagra honoured Hermes as an ancestor of their city and celebrated an important festival in the name of Hermes *Kriophoros* ('ram-bearer'). The original cult statue for this festival showed Hermes as an older, bearded man wearing his iconic cloak. But early in the classical period, a sculptor by the name of Kalamis created a new cult statue, depicting a naked and youthful Hermes carrying a ram across his shoulders. This new image was also adopted for the coins of the city thereafter. The *aition* for this festival told how Hermes had once protected the city from a devastating plague by carrying a ram on his shoulders around the city's walls. As part of their commemoration of this event and in honour of the god who saved them, the people of Tanagra selected the most graceful of the city's youths to serve as ram-bearer in imitation of the god. Like Hermes, he shouldered a ram and walked around the city's walls, re-enacting the salvific action and thereby securing the protection of Hermes for another year (Pausanias 9.22.1–2). The animal was later 'sacrificed to Hermes *Kriophoros* in his sanctuary in the heart of the city' (Jaillard 2007b: 149).

MATURATION

The description of the human ram-bearer chosen to imitate Hermes in Tanagra's festival suggests that he was beyond boyhood but not yet fully entered into manhood (as we would recognise it). This accords well with

the picture given of Hermes in Homer when he makes an appearance before mortals: he appears as a youth at the age of puberty or just beyond (*Iliad* 24.347; *Odyssey* 10.277–80). This also fits with the evidence we have from elsewhere in relation to the age groups in which Hermes was thought to take the greatest interest. Both Pausanias' intimation of Hermes' inclusion in the Mysteries and the age of the Tanagran youth who 'acts as Hermes' in their annual festival have suggested to some that Hermes was once a god who oversaw the initiation rituals of a group of young males (whom we would call 'teenagers' today) in some, if not all, regions of ancient Greece.¹⁴

Although the evidence is not so firm as to claim definitively that Hermes was an initiatory god of the 'rites of passage' variety, there is much to recommend this view, not least of which is the use of the whip by both herders and initiators. A 'shining whip' to drive 'herds' is the first thing Hermes gains from Apollo when he gifts the lyre to his brother (*Hymn to Hermes* 4.497). One of the clearest pieces of evidence for the use of the whip in the instruction of youths comes from the plausibly initiatory 'rites of passages' performed in Sparta and Krete. In these two areas, a metaphorical equivalency seems to be created between animals and humans by the use of a linguistic term that saw youths as 'herds'. According to Plato (*Laws* 636c–d; see also Ephorus *FGH* 70 F 149), as part of the initiation ritual for young men into adulthood, the elders of these two regions divided the youths into groups called 'herds' (*agelai*) according to their ages. The very naming of these human groups by a term used to identify assemblies of animals suggests that the former may have been viewed and treated in a similar matter to the latter. We are told that at Sparta there was a contest in which youths were set the task of stealing cheese from an altar, at which stood men armed with whips. Details are scanty; however, it seems that these youths could be subjected to the lash as part of a test of their endurance. However, in the process of being subjected to this painful and humiliating treatment, they were also taught to fear the prospect of permanent slavery and thus to be even stronger and more courageous in battle.¹⁵

There is perhaps no test of manhood more daunting in the ancient mind than the context of war, and while it is generally believed that Hermes had little to do with military conflict, he does maintain a particularly close relationship with Ares. Certainly in the time of 'Homer' there are clear indications from the oral tradition that tales involving a relationship between these two gods were current. In *Iliad* (5.385–91), we are given a glimpse of one of these lost episodes, wherein Hermes, apparently on his own initiative, saved Ares from virtual extinction by his timely rescue of the god from the bronze jar in which he had been imprisoned. One would suspect that there was some significance in the

fact that it is Hermes who releases 'War' into the world again. In another incident from the *Odyssey* (8.335–43), when Ares is caught in a compromising position with Aphrodite, it is Hermes who lends support to Ares' actions, declaring that he, too, given the opportunity, would do as Ares had done. Some things are just plainly worth the risk of hostile confrontations. Yet again, in the Pythian section of *Hymn to Apollo*, these two gods are found together (200–1): while Apollo plays his lyre, and the Muses and Artemis sing, Hermes and Ares are said to dance ('play', 'romp', 'sport': '*paizdo*' can be used of all these activities) together. A strange scene indeed; that is, until we recall that the most famous and frequently sung songs of the Muses are those tales of men's 'toils' and 'sufferings' (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 190–3) such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In fact, certain forms of dancing were connected with warfare, such as the Pyrrhic dance-in-arms, which the Daktyls, Kouretes and Kouryantes were all said to have danced (Downes 1904). Each of these groups was associated with warriors and each also seems to have been connected in various ways with Hermes.¹⁶

p.63

Another tale survives from Boiotian Tanagra which may retain a memory of this transitional stage of Hermes' relationship with youth, initiation and conflict. In this city, also one of the rival claimants to Hermes' birthplace, there was a sanctuary of Hermes with the title *Promachos* ('Battle-leader'). According to Pausanias (9.22.1–2), when men from nearby Euboia were attacking the city, Hermes appeared at the head of a band of the city's young men, leading them into battle armed with only a *strigil* (an implement used to scrape away sweat and oil from the body after vigorous exertion). This troop of youthful warriors succeeded, under Hermes' leadership, to repulse the invaders and save the city as well as their own lives. Thereafter Hermes received cult as *Promachos* in a sanctuary located in the upper city.¹⁷

In a similar vein at Athens, Hermes received the epithet *Hegemonios* ('[military] leader') and was honoured with sacrifices from the generals (*strategoí*). A scholiast tells us that Hermes received this title and the cult that went with it at the direction of an oracle (scholiast on Aristophanes' *Wealth* 1156). Nevertheless, without further evidence, it cannot be said with certainty that Hermes was once associated with warriors; however, it is clear that he was closely associated in some way with contests and the training of youths, which happen to be closely linked in ancient Greece. Perhaps what remains of Hermes' initiatory role can be seen in his epithet *Enagonios*, 'of contests', and possibly reflected in the athletic games that were held in his honour: the Hermaia. These were games held in a spatial

complex which, by the fourth century BCE if not sooner, could be found in almost every major city in ancient Greece and eventually those of Rome. Indeed, these games for Hermes were deemed so important that they were even held on the islands of Delos and Salamis well into the second century BCE (Mikalson 1998: 195). These space(s) set aside both for practice and competition were presided over by Hermes alongside Herakles and Eros and called the *gymnasion/palaistra* complex. The *Gymnasion* was technically a sports ground in which one would find a running track, a dancing floor, a wrestling ground (*palaistra*) and areas for javelin- and discus-throwing: Pindar is certainly familiar with Hermes as god of the *palaestra* in the early fifth century to judge by his notice in *Olympian Ode* (6.79) and his *Pythian Ode* (2.10).¹⁸

It is possible that this particular triad of gods overseeing the *gymnasion* was not formalised until the fourth century BCE at Athens; however, the grouping eventually became so widespread and long-lasting that Pausanias, when drawing attention to three statues in Messene made by an Egyptian hand which included Hermes and Herakles, can say that these are typically ‘set up in [their] honour in the gymnasia and *palaistrai* by all the Greeks and by this time many barbarians’ (IV.32.1). Indeed, Hermes’ association with two educational spaces was still common enough knowledge for Lucian to retain references to it in six of his satirical works: for instance, in *Dialogues of the Gods* (25), he has Apollo compliment Hermes on his excellence as a trainer of wrestling. In an even more humorous, slice-of-life-type incident, a fellow poet of Lucian’s from Asia Minor by the name of Babrius rehearses a tale, reportedly by Aesop (564, Gibbs, ed.), in which a dog notifies Hermes (as a Herm) that he intends to ‘anoint’ him, because he just cannot resist passing by a god without doing so – especially the god of the *palaistra*!¹⁹

p.64

In the fourth century BCE at least, Plato (*Republic* 411e) knows Hermes and Apollo as the two gods who gave *gymnastika* and *mousika* to humankind, respectively: it was on skills in these two areas that ancient education in the *gymnasion* was based. From this it appears that the process of maturation for most of a city’s boys included physical as well as intellectual training and these took place in the two areas just mentioned: the *gymnasion* and the *palaistra*. In the morning a youth’s education involved instruction in *mousika*, which included learning to recite and compose in a variety of poetic metres, to play a musical instrument and to sing. This is not to say that music was wholly absent from their physical education: under the guidance of a specialised trainer they would participate in a variety of physical activities including running, javelin-

and discus-throwing, wrestling and dancing in unison. The goal was to develop a young man's strength and coordination while simultaneously producing healthy and admirable physiques. It was believed by the Athenians that a fit and graceful body was necessary for the production of a superior warrior and thus that physical and musical training were the ingredients that contributed significantly to the production of the model Athenian citizen.²⁰

As the foregoing indicates, physical training was decidedly athletic in emphasis, and contests in athletics became an equally significant part of the maturation programme at Athens and in a number of city-states throughout Greece. For the purposes of competition, there were typically two age groups into which males between thirteen and twenty years of age were divided for the Athenian Hermaia: boys (*paides*, 13–16) and youths (*ageneioi*, 17–20). It is the latter group in particular who received the greatest amount of attention, as these were the young men who were either on the cusp of becoming citizens or had recently become such, and thus they were the future defenders of the city-state. At Athens and elsewhere, a term was developed to identify a sub-section of the latter age group: the *ephēbēs* (*epi* = after + *hēbēs* = puberty). These were the youths about to embark on two years of more formal military training under the patronage of Apollo.²¹

Much as is the case today, training in athletics and competition seems to go hand in hand: not surprisingly, then, Hermes' association with the athletic training of boys and youths eventuated in an annual competitive festival named for Hermes, the Hermaia. Our earliest evidence for the celebration of these games in Athens dates from the sixth century BCE, but just as Hermes' association with the training and wrestling grounds spread with the Greeks throughout the ancient world, so too did the Hermaia. In fact, the very common *epiklesis* for Hermes as *Enagonios*, 'of contests,' continued to be known and used for centuries. Thus Aristophanes, in *Wealth*, his last extant play from 388 BCE, can have Hermes finally win a place in the new cosmic rule of the god Wealth, as the god of athletics and artistic competitions. Writing in the early fifth century BCE, Pindar claims that in Sparta the Dioskouroi share the patronage of athletic games with Hermes and Herakles, while the later author of *Orphic Hymn* (28) uses *Enagonias* in his praise hymn for Hermes. That the god was so intimately associated with athletics, especially running (given his own phenomenal speed), is attested in the naming of long-distance runners, *Hermerodromoi*, after the god.²²

As noted previously, there seems to have been an early correlation in the mind of some ancient Greeks between youths and groups of animals, which required their oversight by a whip-bearing 'herder'. Pictorial and literary evidence does survive which reveals that the whip was indeed used by the trainers of athletes in preparing them for competition in the games of the *Periodoi*, among others. It is highly probable that the figure of the athletic trainer is a devolution of the role of the initiator of youths in their rites-of-passage trials to the more 'sporting' training of the *gymnasion*. The end goal of these initiatory rites was not only the instruction of the youth in their society's norms and values, but also the preparation of the next group of the society's protectors and defenders, the warrior: this too was the aim of the athletic training and competitive games of the cities of ancient Greece.

OVERVIEW

When moving from one place to another, be it from inside to outside, from one house or city or country to another, or from one stage of life to another, Hermes is the god most closely associated with transitional activity. In the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* Hermes has to demonstrate to his father and his extended family that he has something to offer the group and deserves a place among the rulers of the *kosmos*. He sets about doing so by revealing that he intuitively knows how to get from A to B and back again, and that he can do so with ease. This makes him a 'natural' as a guide and so he also becomes protector of those who travel. In the process of herding fifty cows without the benefit of Apollo's whip, Hermes demonstrates his mastery over creatures which tend to exhibit a group mentality, and as a result he is granted the privilege of patronage over such groups, both animal and human. Among the latter group are young males, who require the guidance of a leader to keep them together and their behaviour in check. By his killing of two cows in what bears similarities to a wrestler's hold and his slaughtering of them in a manner appropriate to pre-battle sacrifice, Hermes demonstrates his own innate strength and athletic ability and thus wins his place as both overseer of the training of youths in the skills of sport and war and guide and protector of them on the field. Additionally, given that Hermes was the only god who had to contend for his place among the Olympians, it makes especially good sense that he should be the one to oversee the training and contests of other youngsters and young adults as they contended for recognition and acceptance within their own social organisations. Thus, while it is certainly possible that Hermes' association with war is one he loses as Greek society changes, a remnant of it remains in his involvement with the athletic training of youth as preliminary preparation of the

warrior, especially as Hermes *Enagonios*, the god of contests who oversees the transition of each winner from a mere face in the crowd to a person of renown, not unlike Hermes himself.

NOTES

- 1 Context may suggest that when Hermes is involved in bringing some insensate object from one person or place to another, the translation ‘courier’ would be more appropriate.
- 2 Webster (1948) discusses some South Italian vases depicting fourth-century comic scenes based on mythic narratives in which Hermes is shown leading another god to a clandestine meeting with a female. Hermes was also known as a god who would abduct nubile young women from the dancing choruses of Artemis for far less honourable purposes, as is reported as early as Homer’s *Iliad* (16.179–86). Kratinos’ play was called *Dionysalexandros* – a combination of two names, the god Dionysos, and the Trojan Prince, Alexandros – because Dionysos gets tricked into playing the part of the prince as the judge of the beauty contest amongst the goddesses. Unfortunately, the play survives only in fragments. In second-century Rome, Lucian also makes use of Hermes as divine guide in his *Judgement of the Goddesses*. For images of Hermes leading the goddesses, see *LIMC* (5.2:238–9) and Stinton (1965). Lucian’s tale is known by either its Greek title, *Kharon*, or its Latin title, *Contemplantes*. Elsewhere this author uses Hermes as a guide in *Downward Journey*, *Timon*, and *Twice Accused*. For Hermes’ association with nymphs, see Larson (2001); for specific instances see, for example, Kopestonsky’s (2016) discussion of the cult of the nymphs and Corinth and Larson (1997) on nymphs in Hermes’ Hymn. For nymphs in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* see Scheinberg (1979).
- 3 For images, description and discussion of Hermes and Keryx at Eleusis, see [Chapter 2](#), note 5. For the role of light in the Mysteries, see Patera (2010). The fifth-century tragedian, Euripides, made reference to Hermes as the guide in at least three other plays: as guide of the goddesses to Paris (*Iphigenia at Aulis* 1302ff.); of Perseus to Medusa (*Electra* 403–4); and of Helen to Egypt (*Helen* 44–8). In Sophokles’ *Philoktetes* (133) he is invoked for assistance as Odysseus’ personal guide. Aesop goes on to report that Ge reluctantly agreed, but only after being compelled to cooperate by Hermes and with a warning that she would not make it easy for them, somewhat reminiscent of the unyielding earth after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden in Genesis (3.17–19).
- 4 The philosopher Theophrastus notes (25.4–6) that Hermes, more than any other god, is angered whenever someone denies help to a traveller in need of direction, suggesting that non-travellers may be subject to the god’s wrath if they fail to give assistance. For more on Hermes’ concern with proper hospitable relationships, see [Chapter 4](#).
- 5 Pausanias, as he travels through Greek cities and the countryside between them, seems to take note of every boundary Herm he passes, as for instance he does when commenting on the Herm stationed on the border between the Argolid and Laconia (2.38.7; noted again in 3.1.1). This suggests that Herms were a forerunner of the modern practice of erecting road signs notifying drivers that they are now leaving such-and-such a state, province and even country and shortly thereafter another

indicating that they are now entering a new territory. For Herms receiving libations and offerings, see *LIMC* (5.2: 208–13).

- 6 Pausanias mentions seeing a Herm or anthropomorphic statue of Hermes at a boundary or along the road at least nine times: 1.15.1; 22.5; 27.1; 2.38.7; 3.1.1; 22.13; 4.33.3; 8.34.5; 9.10.2. Chaniotis (1988) also discusses a fifth sanctuary of Hermes Kornisaioi, which appears to be named for the ‘no-man’s-land’ between the territories of Itanos and Heiropytna.
- 7 For Hermes as the god of reciprocity, see [Chapter 4](#).
- 8 For more on the blood sacrifice ritual and its use in sanctuaries, see chapters in Mylonopoulos (2010); Stavrianopoulou (2006); Corbett (1970).
- 9 On the apotropaic status of Hermes Propylaios, see Platt (2011: 35–6); for Hermes Propylaios on Thrasos, see Westgate (2015). Salviat (1964) notes the use of simple stone piles at doors to sacred buildings representing Hermes. On the religious significance of the threshold in ancient Greece, see Christopoulos (2006).

p.67

- 10 It is worth noting that although Athens did enjoy a few victorious engagements against Sparta and her allies after 415 BCE, Athens never really recovered from the losses suffered during the Sicilian expedition and ultimately lost the war in 404 BCE.
- 11 The smaller size of these exterior household Herms is conjectured on the basis of the narrowness of the streets and the fact that evidence of exterior alcoves has been found; however, some scholars do imagine full-sized Herms to have been the norm, in light of the information gleaned from a passage in Thucydides (6.27, esp. 27.3) on the mutilation of the city’s Herms late one night in 415 BCE. For a clear and concise discussion of the Herms’ mutilation and aftermath, see Hamel (2012), with references and bibliography; and Kouser (2015).
- 12 Most scholars accept that there are at least two lines missing in the surviving text (567–8) and their filling is conjectural based on the content of the preceding and following lines. It is clear that Hermes’ lordship over animal and avian life is being expanded as, after the break, we have a list of creatures: ‘fierce lions and white-tusked boars / and dogs and sheep and whatever the wide earth nourishes’ (569–70). On Hermes’ protective function, see, for example, Chittenden (1947a); Marinatos (2000).
- 13 There are six occasions on which Pausanias notes seeing a statue of Hermes either carrying a ram or seated with a ram at his side: 2.3.4; 4.33.4; 5.27.8; 9.22.1; 22.2; 34.2. This includes the notice that in Arkadia, near to Mount Kyllene, is the town of Pheneos where the townspeople thought so highly of Hermes that at some time near the end of the sixth century BCE they made a dedication at Olympia of a statue of Hermes bearing a ram under his arm (5.27.8). This image seems to have been a popular one in Arkadia, on which see Jost (1985: 446–8).
- 14 Hermes and his son Pan were the gods of the Theban mystic initiations of the Kabeiroi, although he is unlikely to have been a god in the Samothracian mysteries, despite Herodotos’ comments (2.51): on these cults, see Schachter (2016: 315, 328); for just the Kabeiroi, Schachter (2003); for Samothrace, Burkert (1993); Blakely (2012). On the initiatory nature of the cult of Hermes and Aphrodite on Crete, see Erickson (2009) and the seminal work of Lebesse (1976); Lebesse and Muhly (1987, 1990). For Hermes and Aphrodite at Argos, see Marchetti (1993).
- 15 Our evidence that the initiates of various mystery cults were subjected to the lash is

rather scanty and somewhat late. The most well-known piece of evidence comes from the *Villa dei Misteri* house near Pompeii. In a room dubbed the ‘Hall of the Mysteries’ a young female initiate is shown being whipped by an official before being allowed to proceed on to a later stage in the process. Evidence suggests that the whip was also used in the rites of Dionysos and possibly in the cult of Herakles (Achilles Tatius *Cleitophon and Leuchippe* 5.23.6). The abbreviation *FGH* refers to the title *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, edited by C. Müller, which is to be distinguished from *FGrHist*, *Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, edited by F. Jacoby. On the use of whips, see Xenophon, *Constitution of the Spartans* (2.9); Plato *Laws* (633b); Pausanias (3.16.0); Plutarch (*Lycurgus* 28). According to Thoukydides (5.50.4), the whip was also used to punish fraudulent athletes at the Games.

- 16 Moreover, as a god who can tie and untie knots, one might infer that Hermes has no fear of being trapped as Ares was himself. Both Pindar (*Nemian* 8) and Bakkhylides (*Epinician* 9.10–24 SM) make reference to the staging of games before battle. The association with warriors is based on Willet’s (1965: 79–81, 98) comments regarding the other activities and associations in which these groups participate. The parallels with Hermes’ activities and associations in other myths is striking: care and rescue of young; teaching and training of youth; defender/protector of another deity; and an association with bees and honey, to name just a few.
- 17 Jaillard (2007b: 145) observes that the Hermes *Promachos* of Tanagra ‘has all the virtues of the best ephebe’ but sees the transition of the ‘pacific *strigil*’ into a ‘formidable weapon of combat’ as an indication of a different aspect of Hermes’ persona: see also Chapter 5. Schachter (2016: 13) notes the existence of a bronze libation dish (*phiale*) found at Tanagra most probably dedicated to Hermes by a Theban military unit between 610 and 550 BCE. For further discussion of Hermes *Promachos* at Tanagra, see Jaillard (2007b). One late source suggests that the *strigil* should be used as a weapon (like a sword) against other cowardly athletes (Philostratos, *Gymnastika* 18).

p.68

- 18 Unfortunately we are no wiser as to what occasioned the oracle. For other comments on Hermes *Hegemonios*, see Mikalson (1998: 37–8); Parker (1996: 238).
- 19 Rather oddly, Messene seems to have preferred the Athenian hero Theseus as the third statue of their *gymnasion*’s triad over that of Eros. For the use of Herms at the gymnasia on Delos, see Michaelowski (1930). See also Lucian (*Twice Accused* 8, *Downward Journey* 1, *Dialogues of the Gods* 11, 17 and *Dialogues of the Dead* 20). Athletes anointed themselves with oil before exercising, hence the double-entendre; one can well imagine that Herms and other statues such as those of Apollo Ageuius would be as attractive to dogs then as lampposts are to dogs today. Babrius is the author of many iambic verses contained in the collection known under Aesop’s name.
- 20 Scanlon (1998) discusses the integral role of physical training in ancient Greek education; on ancient Greek education generally, see Griffith (2015). We derive the English term ‘gymnastics’ from the Greek *gymnastika*, which translates literally as ‘exercise done naked’ in the ‘place of naked exercise’, *gymnasion*, but is conventionally translated, ‘training ground’; the *palaistra* was the ‘wrestling ground’. On the importance of dance, especially synchronised dancing in ancient Greece, see Lonsdale (1993).
- 21 This is according to Scanlon (2002: 92) for Athens. The age groupings are extremely

loose given that the terminology linked with each age group varied from state to state, rendering ages referred to by each term most challenging to interpret. Given that ‘*ephebes*’ was the term applied to a group of young men of at least eighteen years old who were about to undergo two years of military training as frontier guards, it seems unlikely that preposition ‘*epi*’ has the meaning ‘on’ here, as this would imply ‘at the beginning of puberty’ or shortly thereafter. Goblet-Cahen (2007) offers an intriguing discussion of the relationship amongst Heralds, *ephebes* and satyrs.

- 22 See, for instance, Aischylos (*Choephoroi* 727–9); Pindar (*Olympian* 6.79); *Pythian* (2.10); *Isthmian* (1.60); Pausanias (5.14.9). Even the possibly second-century ce *Orphic Hymn* (28) calls Hermes *Enagonias*. Costa (1982) argued that Hermes has always been a god associated with the initiation of youth into adulthood through trials and contests and that the Hermaia had its origins in initiation ritual. See now Scanlon (2002: 91). According to Tsoukala (2009) Hermes *Enagonios* is found on the island of Kos receiving cult between 250 and 240 BCE, and appears on a fragmentary inventory from a Athenian gymnasium from 170–125 BCE (Clay 1977). It is possible that the Hermaia was even celebrated in the Asian Bosphorus in the 200s BCE according to Muratov (2015: 602). On *Hermerodromoi*, see Matthews (1974).



4

TRANSACTIONS

The Fourth *Homeric Hymn* is a song meant to please the god by rehearsing his various talents and offices within the ruling Olympian family, and as such it is the most fitting place to look for details about Hermes' sovereignty over matters of exchange involving the movement of goods (including words) and services between and among individuals and groups. On this aspect of Hermes' *timai* the *Hymn* is explicit: Hermes received from Zeus the honour of 'establishing works of exchange (*epamoibia*) among men throughout the bountiful earth' (516–17). Such an office may seem rather odd, given that Hermes initiated his contact with his Olympian family through an act of thievery, a means of acquisition that certainly does not fit with most people's ideas of what an 'exchange' entails. However, if we consider the sorts of activities in which Hermes engages before he receives lordship over all exchanges, his worthiness to be granted such a title is perfectly understandable.¹

DÔTÔR EAÔN: 'GIVER OF GOOD'

In his first appearance in the *Hymn*, as Hermes acts in and interacts with the world, he creates (and in one instance, refines) ways for mortals and immortals to interact with each other and among themselves. His first act is to create a musical instrument that will become a most highly valued 'Comrade of the Feast'. Its creation does originate in an act of violence; however, it is initiated by an invitation to give and receive a favour which will result in living tortoises being held in honour (something not granted them now) as a talisman against baneful attack, while those that are dead will have a life beyond death as the accompaniment to the convivial feasts of mortals (and gods, as it turns out). In fact, only Hermes and the tortoise are given the poetic epithet 'Comrade of the Feast' (*Dais Hetairos*), indicating how deeply connected each was to this convivial event in the

minds of the poets and their audiences. To put his accomplishment in different terms, the first thing Hermes does on encountering a living creature in the mortal world is establish a relationship based on the exchange of benefits. For as Hermes makes clear, by first aiding him he will not dishonour the tortoise in return (34–5), and in saying this he lays out the reciprocal nature of all exchanges over which he will preside: for located in Hermes' mention of 'dishonour' is the ideological motivation underlying the ethical obligation to reciprocate once one has received benefit from another – *timê* ('honour') – that which Hermes desires to receive most of all (172–5). Hermes' role in the establishment of the norms of reciprocity, which will grow to embrace all manner of exchange types, begins right here in his encounter with the tortoise.²



Figure 4.1 'Hermes and Silenos with lyre and kantharos', Berlin painter, early fifth century BCE

Bildagentur / Staatliche Museen / Johannes Laurentius / Art Resource, NY

Reciprocity turns out to be just as important an element in the establishment and maintenance of human relationships for us today as it was for the ancient Greeks. According to sociologists such as Sahlins (1968), there are three kinds of reciprocities in which humans engage. The

one which Hermes is shown creating with the tortoise is known as 'generalised' reciprocity. An interaction of this sort involves exchanges of goods (including words) and services that are seen by both parties as relatively equal in value, but not exactly so. This type of reciprocity exists primarily in the exchange of gifts and services. The slight variations in the value of the things given and the interval of time between the giving and receipt of something in return contribute to the continuation of the relationship between the parties, who will go on exchanging with each other until their exchanges reach a state of equilibrium. However, as long as there are other reasons to continue the relationship, the parties will ensure that this state is never reached. One of the strategies used to maintain a generalised state of reciprocity is for one party to give something of value to a member of the other's family: taking care of the needs of someone dear is typically viewed as the same as receiving something of benefit for oneself.

p.71

It is also a way of building up a network of parties involved in the same exchange group. For example, in assisting one of Dionysos' devotees – here a drunken satyr ([Figure 4.1](#)) – to get where he wants to go, Hermes is simultaneously strengthening his reciprocal friendship with Dionysos and perhaps initiating a new relationship with this particular satyr. As long as each person can feel confident that the favour will come back from somewhere in the network, they can remain on friendly terms with everyone. In a similar way, the men who rear livestock will sacrifice to Hermes in thanks for an increase in stock, which precipitates a cycle of thanks offering and increase. At Thebes, the city required its goat- and sheep-herders to bring a specific number of their choicest kids and lambs to the altar of Hermes *Ktênitês* ('protectors of herds') to be sacrificed. These animals provided meat for all of the citizens, while also giving honour to the god who oversaw the growth in the size of the flock. Here both god and community are assumed to remain in a satisfactory reciprocating relationship.³

As several of Hermes' epithets reveal, this is an area of exchange in which Hermes is seen to be most active. At least two of his poetic epithets speak to his concern with and oversight of what we would call complimentary exchanges, particularly those associated with convivial and satisfying interactions. Hermes is addressed with the epithet 'Giver of Good' (*Dôtor Eaôn*) on four occasion in Homeric verse in reference to both tangible and intangible 'gifts' (*Odyssey* 8:335; *Hymn to Hermes* 4.12; *Hymn to Hermes* 18:12; *Hymn to Hestia* 29:9; see also *Orphica* Fragment, column F, 4). Hand-in-hand with the receipt of concrete pleasures is the

‘heart-gladdening’ that Hermes brings as *Charmophrôn* (*Homeric Hymn* 4.127), often in the context of feasting.

In light of this close association between Hermes and feasts, it makes sense that after creating the lyre, the next thing Hermes sets out to do is to create the context for its use. Given that playing host to a guest almost always involved sharing a meal at which meat was served, for his prophetic words to the tortoise to be released, Hermes must procure meat for the feast at which he will re-establish the meal once shared by gods and mortals in a way that also indicates his worthiness to be counted among their number. What Hermes does with two of the fifty cows taken from Apollo’s herd actually conflates elements from several *different types* of ritual slaughter into a single event and this may be why the poet refrains from naming the type of meal Hermes prepares, calling it neither a sacrifice (*thusia*) nor a feast (*dais*). Additionally, although the distribution of meat is reminiscent of the equal portions so clearly associated with the *daitos eisês* (‘equal feast’) in Homer, the poet avoids using either term in the description of the event. So, in his division of the meat into twelve servings and his distribution of them by lot (128) with the addition of a ‘portion of honour’ (*geras*, 129) added to each, the poet recalls the first presentation of meat to the gods since the Promethean division, at which all the gods are equally honoured. Hermes, most scholars agree, includes himself as one of the twelve recipients here, and like the rest of the gods, neither he nor they reach out to consume the meat (although Hermes deeply desires to do so; 130–3). Some bones will still be burnt to commemorate the separation of gods and mortals (as represented by Hermes’ burning of the head, the hooves and left-over bones; 136–7), but at Hermes’ new feast, the gods will be welcomed as guests at a meal, their portion laid out on a surface resembling a table (here a broad, flat stone; 127–8) where, once again, they will take pleasure in the company of men: feasts of this kind will come to be known as a *theoxenia*: ‘hosting the gods’ or ‘guest-god’ feasts.⁴

It may well be that Hermes’ epithet ‘Giver of Good’ was granted in recognition of his preference for rewarding those who respect and maintain the beneficial types of exchanges; that is, those involved in building friendly relationships, especially the ones related to hospitality. The possibility that a stranger at the door may be a god in disguise is at least as old as Homer: at *Odyssey* 10 (483–7) Antinoos is reminded of this by another suitor when Odysseus appears at the door of his own home disguised as a beggar. There are, in fact, several tales in which Zeus and Hermes, disguised as men, arrive unexpectedly at the homes of mortals in

order to test their adherence to the laws of hospitality over which Zeus presides as Zeus *Xenios* ('of hosts' and 'of strangers'). When they find mortals who receive them graciously at their table, they are richly rewarded for doing so. Among those who received the favour of the gods were Baucis and Philemon, an aged couple living in Lydia (Anatolia) who, though very poor, shared with the gods the little they had. In recompense, while the couple are ascending a local mountain in company with the gods, the entire valley in which they lived is flooded, but their home is spared and transformed into a shrine to the gods. They are granted the privilege of serving as its priests and of not having to live through the death and burial of the other: for as they were breathing their last, the gods transformed them into two trees growing from the same trunk to be a memorial of the gods' visit and their standing as hospitable hosts. This is the version of the tale as told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* (8.628–719), a work in which he narrates tales of the transformation of one living creature into another life-form or substance (e.g., Battos' transformation into stone by Hermes). So familiar was this Baucis and Philemon story that the author of the Book of Acts (14.8–18) in the Christian New Testament could be certain that when he reported the reaction of the citizens of Lystra to the arrival of the apostles Paul and Barnabas, his readers or auditors would wholly understand it: the Lystrans thought these two miracle-working visitors were Zeus and Hermes come to test them again, and so they prepared to offer them sacrifice. In fact, it could be said that the entire sacrificial system through which mortals engaged with the gods was based on the principles of generalised reciprocity.⁵

Although Ovid's tale of Baucis and Philemon is late, it is in keeping with earlier tales about Hermes and his association with hospitality. As early as the *Odyssey* (15.313–24), Hermes is named as the one who gives 'grace' or 'favour' (*charis*) to those who know how to prepare and serve meals to others. The swineherd, Eumaios, perhaps because Hermes is the god who protects the animals which provide the meat, and the one who set the precedent for 'equal feasts', knows how to prepare a meal with respect, setting aside one of seven portions of his guest-meal for Hermes and the nymphs (*Odyssey* 14.428–36). However, neither sacrificing to the gods nor hosting them to a *xenia*-meal was the only way of initiating a friendly reciprocal relationship with them (or with fellow mortals). Hermes, as 'Giver of Good', also gifted his brother Apollo with a song that gave him the respect and honour that was his due (especially as his elder, 427–33), just as he had done previously with the tortoise. Both the giving of appropriate praise and the giving of tangible objects were ways in which to show honour, and both of these could initiate or serve to continue a relationship between parties. Not infrequently, Hermes himself is asked to engage in such exchanges. Thus a Friendship Association on the island to

Epigrams, too, were a favourite way to give honour to the god and indicate what the giver would like in return at the same time. So, in *Epigram* 9.314, the speaker, Archias the Younger, directly addresses Hermes as the 'lord who dwells in the Korykian city' and requests him to view his offering favourably. In another *Epigram* (9.72) Antipater calls Hermes *Eukolos* ('easily contented') because he takes joy in the offerings of milk and honey that the shepherds give the god, and then contrasts Hermes with Herakles, who is not so easily satisfied. A third anonymously written *Epigram* (10.12) invites travellers to come and sit beside 'Hermes, guardian of the road' (*phylaki hodos*); however, he limits the invitation to only those who are truly weary and thirsty after much toil and these he advises, after taking their rest, to give honour to 'Hermes of the Way' (*Einodion*). The expected reciprocity between god and mortal is made equally as explicit in *Epigram* 13.2 by a certain Phaidimos, who dedicated a statue of a youth said to be the same age as Hermes in thanks for which he requests that the god show favour to the father, the son and his home.

In the story of Aesop related by Philostratos in his *Life of Apollonios of Tyana* (5.15.29–33), even Aesop's meagre offerings to Hermes do not pass without a return: in response to them, Hermes grants Aesop skill in the first art the god himself learned, the art of fable-making, otherwise known as mythology. Another person of lowly station, a woodsman named Maccalion, reportedly carved two wooden statues which he dedicated to Hermes. In this four-line poem by Leonidas of Tarentum (*Epigram* 9.335), the god's attention is directed to the expert craftsmanship of these wooden icons, and told that Maccalion has given 'good gifts'. The implication is that Hermes should give 'good gifts' in return. An inscription (*IG* I² 631) attests to the same relationship wherein a self-identified Herald gives thanks in return to Hermes for his skill in remembering.

Even the gods adopt Hermes' gift-giving means of creating and affirming a relationship of friendship with their mortal descents. Diodoros Siculus, a historian of the first century BCE, reports that the first wedding at which the gods gave gifts was that between Kadmos and Harmonia: not surprisingly, Hermes is said to have given them a lyre (*Histories* 5.49.1)! Six centuries later, Nonnos reports on the same wedding, saying that Hermes gave Kadmos a sceptre (*Dionysiaca* 5.130), perhaps blending the account of Hermes' delivery of the sceptre to the first mortal in the ruling line of the Pelopidai (*Iliad* 2.100–9) with Diodoros' own.

In the adventure of the hero Perseus, Hermes is said to have given the young man either his winged sandals and traveller's cap as well as the cap of invisibility (Pseudo-Hyginus *Astronomica* 2.12), or just the winged sandals (Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 25.56), so that he could speedily arrive and depart after decapitating Medusa. On this adventure Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 4.740) notes that when it was successfully completed, Perseus set up three earthen altars, one for each of the gods who had assisted him (Hermes, Zeus and Athena), and to Hermes he offered a calf. Hermes' willing assistance of young men in the process of demonstrating their manhood (such as was Perseus) may be an extension of his roles as the rescuer of infants and overseers of the *gymnasion*. But as Nikias' *Epigram* (16.188) indicates, he also received gifts from them:

p.74

Leaving behind the high and steep hills of well-wooded Kyllene

I, Hermes, stand here as guardian of the lovely gymnasion

Where upon me the boys place marjoram and hyacinths

And many fresh wreaths of violets.

As a way of honouring Hermes, the people who dwelt in two different areas where he was reportedly cared for by local inhabitants, both unsurprisingly in the territory of Arkadia, set those spaces aside as sacred and also honoured the caretakers. The place of Three Springs near the city of Pheneos where the nymphs of the mountain bathed the new-born god became a place where both Hermes and the nymphs were honoured and commemorated (Pausanias 8.16.1). Also in the hills near Hermes' birthplace a story was told that Akakos, the son of Arkadia's king Lykaon, once served as foster-father to the young god (Pausanias 8.36.10). He is commemorated in the name of Hermes as Akakesios, and in the name of the temple built to honour both ancestors. However, according to Pseudo-Hyginus (*Fables* 225), the first person to build a temple to Hermes was Lykaon himself. In a similar way, because the gods so valued Hermes' creation and especially the skill with which Orpheus played and sang, when he died they placed a lyre in the sky as a constellation in his honour, an eternal reminder of the beauty of his music (Pseudo-Hyginus, *Astronomica* 2.7).

In addition to Hermes' oversight and engagement with generalised reciprocity among gods and mortals, he has a similar relationship with those things in both the animate and inanimate natural world that have done a service for him, and these tend to become closely associated with

him. While it may be going too far to say that these ‘belong’ to Hermes in a strongly possessive way, it would not be incorrect to say that he was thought to hold a certain deep affection for various species of plants and animals. In the sentient category, as the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* makes clear, pride of place goes to the tortoise without whose fortuitous presence and cooperation Hermes may have had a far more challenging time gaining his place among the ruling gods on Olympos. Although the lyre itself becomes Apollo’s iconic possession, the tortoise from which its body is made retains its close association with Hermes. Pausanias noted that at Megalopolis (8.30.6), all that remained of the temple in which Hermes was worshipped as *Akakesios* was a stone tortoise, clearly a sculpture of the creature dear to the god and given to do him honour. In Argos, where Hermes and Aphrodite shared a temple, they also shared the symbol of the tortoise, although in all likelihood it represented something different to each of them.⁷

It would also seem, based on Hesiod’s brief notice in *Theogony* (444), that a close second to the tortoise from the animal world is the ram, without whose activity in the sheep-fold Hermes’ status as a god of herd-growth may not have arisen. But perhaps even more significantly, the ancient shepherd having a responsive and dependable lead ram was a boon to his task of controlling and guiding the flock: as a guide himself, Hermes has a close affinity to the lead ram. Another tale in which Hermes is associated with a ram is that of involving Nephele and her two children, Phrixos and Helle in Boiotia. On the point of being wrongfully sacrificed by his father, the innocent Phrixos, along with his sister, were scooped up by their mother and flown away on a golden ram which Nephele had received from Hermes (Apollodoros *Bibliothēke* 1.9.1). After Phrixos’ safe arrival in Kolchos, the ram was sacrificed to Zeus, either at the ram’s own direction (Apollonios Rhodios, *Argonautica* 2.1141–9) or under the direction of Hermes (4.118–21). Unfortunately, our author does not tell us how Hermes came to have the golden ram or anything about its relationship to him, but it is fair to assume that his audience would hear nothing unusual in Hermes having access to, if not owning, a golden-fleeced ram, as gold was the metal of the gods.⁸

There is yet one more animal with which Hermes seems to have a special relationship and that is the dog. In the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* his ability to silence dogs is clearly implied (145) and this indicates that the animals recognise him as their pack leader. Perhaps this is why the dogs attending Apollo’s cows, to Apollo’s own amazement, remained behind with the bull (194–6). Even earlier than the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*, the

iambic poet Hipponax, famous for his harsh poetic invectives, calls Hermes a 'dog-throttler' when asking for the god's assistance in the silencing of the dogs so that he might steal what he needs and get away (fr.45W); however, the poet may merely be engaging in a bit of fun by making play with Hermes' longstanding epithet, Argeiphontês ('dog-slayer'), here. But hunters too made use of dogs and Hermes was venerated by hunters, not only for the favour they received from him in guiding them to the prey they sought, but also for his oversight of the dogs (*Homeric Hymn* 4.140, 144; Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women* fragment 16, reported in Antionius Liberalis *Metamorphoses* 23) (Figure 4.2). Arrian (*De Venatione* 34) even states that a prudent hunter would offer him sacrifice before initiating his hunt. In light of this, an inscription from the fourth century BCE found in the sanctuary of Asklepias in the Piraeus is particularly interesting (*IG* II² 4962; *SIG*³ 1040; *LGS* II.18). It directs the making of specific preliminary sacrifices to specific gods, including giving three wheat cakes to each of Hermes, the dogs and the huntsmen (among others).

If it were not known that at the original healing sanctuary of Asklepias at Epidauros, the hunters identified as his sons, Machaon and Podalirios, hunted with dogs (Lamont 2015), scholars would have to speculate on the significance of these three being listed together in the prescription: the most 'natural' assumption to make would be that this was a specific prescription for sick or wounded hunters, preparatory to healing, given that Hermes was associated with both dogs and hunters, and was the deity also associated with the bringing of dreams, used by Asklepias to communicate with his patients. Additionally, it was Hermes who reportedly rescued Asklepias as an unborn babe from the pyre by which his mother was being punished by Zeus (Pausanias 2.26.6).⁹

From the world of vegetation, Hermes seems to have been especially fond of two plants, the crocus and the strawberry tree. According to the medical writer Galen (*De constitutione artis medicae*, 9.4), Hermes had as a close companion a youth by the name of Krokos, who was accidentally killed by the god when throwing a discus. Being deeply disturbed by this accident and the loss of the teenager, rather than burying the boy's body, he transformed it into a flower which bore the same name as the youth. The story is late – its author is second to third century ce – so we cannot be sure whether this is an old association for which we have no earlier evidence or a more recent invention. In either case, it is clear that Hermes is credited with acting out of both a desire to honour and to 'repay' the youth for his companionship.



Figure 4.2 'Hermes among hunters', Amasis painter, third quarter sixth century BCE, side B of black figure amphora, Inv. F 1688

Bildagentur / Staatliche Museen; Ingrid Geske / Art Resource, NY

Another writer of the second century ce, our familiar sight-seer Pausanias (9.22.2), tells us that the Tanagrans preserved the remains of an

ancient 'strawberry tree' under which they believed Hermes had been nourished, suggesting that this particular tree was thereby 'sacred' to the god. Again, whether we may extrapolate from this and claim that the plant itself, wherever it grew, was sacred to Hermes is questionable, although it would not be surprising, given that as a species we humans tend to look kindly on both animate and inanimate things that at some point in our lives proved beneficial to us, even those that are not the very ones that provided the help or gave us pleasure.

Hermes, then, if not the inventor of the reciprocal system of gift-exchange, is certainly a creative participant in its use. This would explain, in part, why he is given lordship over exchanges among men, even though many today would not wish to view gift-giving in such a light. Indeed, most would be more inclined to limit Hermes' lordship to those transactions that fall into the categories of another type of reciprocity.

p.77

HERMES AGORAIOS

The second of the three reciprocities into which Hermes' oversight of exchanges falls is referred to as 'balanced'. In exchanges of this type, whatever good or service someone provides to another is balanced by the return of a good or service agreed to be of *equal* value to that person. Because there is no perceived difference in the value of the things exchanged, neither of the parties is left indebted to the other, and so there is no basis in the exchange itself on which to establish an ongoing relationship. As a result, balanced reciprocity is most closely associated with commercial interactions wherein Person A wants a certain amount for his product, and Person B is willing to pay it. Beyond the exchange of money (or goods or services) for goods or services, there is no need for A and B to continue communicating. As this description indicates, the forms of the exchanges classified as 'balanced' includes those that are conducted by simple trades, bartering and sale (usually for profit).

Examples of each of these forms of exchange also appear in abbreviated form in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* after Hermes and Apollo arrive at the cave where the cows were sequestered. First, in stating that Hermes' song is worth the fifty cows under dispute (437), Hermes and Apollo effectively negotiate a direct exchange (that is, a trade) of one for the other. This brings an end to their conflict and were it not for the lyre, the relationship might well have ended here. However, no longer being at odds does allow them to engage in further exchanges with each other should they desire to

do so, and both certainly do so desire. The next phase in their interaction has the look of two men engaging in barter over some object of desire, which in this instance is the lyre for Apollo and a share in Apollo's prophetic lordship for Hermes. Each of the gods compliments the other and, less obviously, the items in which each has an interest, behaviour common to the preliminary stages of barter by which each establishes the other's relative skills as bargainer and determines how easily each might obtain their object of desire. In this case, Apollo has already betrayed himself to Hermes as the party most desirous to possess what the other has and this would leave Hermes in the superior bargaining position. Had Hermes not changed tack by turning their initial bargaining session into a gift-exchange, this second transaction would have ended with each party agreed on the equality of the goods exchanges and lacking any further basis for continued interaction.¹⁰ In fact, the poet indicates that neither Hermes nor Apollo wholly surrenders his association with one area in order to participate in the other: Hermes shares his art of lyre-playing and Apollo shares his art of herding as together the two brothers drive the cows and play the lyre on their way back to the pastures of Pieria.¹¹

So Hermes circumvents the possibility of their exchange becoming 'balanced' by giving the lyre to Apollo as a gift and this converts the whip, representing the lordship over herds received from Apollo as a counter-gift, the first of the many gifts Apollo said the lyre was worth (461-2). In this capacity, Hermes gains two more epithets, *Nomios* ('Pastoral Hermes') and *Epimelos* ('Care-taker of Sheep'). However, because Hermes has already been granted lordship over all forms of exchange, Apollo is not prepared to give Hermes the rest of these many gifts unless his little brother is prepared to swear an oath. Now it is as though Hermes and Apollo have become two merchants in negotiation over the shipment of goods, as men in these professions typically required oaths to be sworn before agreeing to finance or convey items from one port to another: Apollo, like the merchant, is concerned about the potential loss of property and seeks to indemnify himself against such loss (513-15). With the joint oaths sworn, Apollo gives Hermes the rest of his gifts, and these include Hermes' golden staff, which produces bliss and wealth (529), and his oversight of the Bee Maiden oracle (550-66).¹²

While technically any type of exchange could take place anywhere there were two people willing to part with what each had for something the other possessed, the most common place for such exchanges to occur was in the '*agora*', the 'gathering-place' or 'marketplace', which could be found in almost every city in the Greek world. At Athens, as elsewhere, this was a

space clearly defined and set apart by boundary markers, and governed by rules about who could and could not enter it. The surest indication that Hermes was believed to oversee the goings-on in the *agora* is his cult title *Agoraios*, ‘of the *agora*’, a title he held throughout the Greek world.¹³

As Pausanias made his way through the former Greek states, he often commented on the presence of a ‘Market Hermes’ in a city’s *agora*. For instance, he notes a statue of Hermes *Agoraios* holding the infant Dionysos when passing through the *agora* in Sparta (3.11.11); in the Corinthian marketplace he observes two bronze statues of Hermes, one having its own shrine (2.2.7); a bronze statue of the god set up in the middle of the *agora* was also seen by him in Athens (1.15.1); even in ‘a little city by the sea’, as Pausanias describes it, there is a Hermes of the Marketplace. It should not surprise us that the statue of Hermes *Agoraios* in the market-square at Pharai did double duty as the oracle of Hermes (7.22.1). Hermes *Agoraios* statues could also be recipients of prayers, libations and offering of fruits, cereals and flowers both in thanks for a successful day’s takings or in the hopes of making a good deal. Indeed, in Aristophanes’ *Wealth* (1120–2), Hermes complains about the loss of all sorts of yummy ‘treats’ he used to receive from the ‘lady inn-keepers’, now that everyone is worshipping the god Wealth. While the items named are slang terms for various parts of the female anatomy, the humour works because Hermes and the rest of the gods often received such actual food items as gifts.

Beyond those exchanges meant to establish ongoing relationships, as his *epiklesis* indicates, Hermes in the *agora* is the god who oversees the transaction of a commercial kind. One epithet, which appears in Aristophanes’ *Wealth* (1155) and *Acharnians* (816), may be an actual cult title for the god (*SEG* 908) and gives explicit expression to his relationship with commercial activities: he is called *Empoliaos* (‘Importer’, ‘Entrepreneur’ and ‘of Commerce’) (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3 'Hermes with staff and money bag', bronze, fourth century BCE

Louvre (Museum), Paris, Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

It is likely that this was a popular name for Hermes in the seaports of the ancient world, which were a primary hub of activity for the importers and exporters of the day. Merchants would sell the food-stuffs and other material goods to local entrepreneurs, who would either get paid for the delivery of a shipment for which they had been contracted, or on-sell the

goods they were carrying in bulk to smaller vendors, who might then sell them directly to customers in the marketplace or carry them overland to smaller cities and towns further afield. In this regard, a Scholiast to Plato's *Laws* (11.914b), as an aside to his discussion of the 'Wayside *Daimon*' as Hekate, makes a connections between the roadside Herms and commerce: according to him Hermes also had the title of 'Wayside Leader' in recognition of his assistance in business affairs. It seems the author is thinking about those who transport goods overland either under contract or as speculators.

It is quite possible that one of the reasons why Hermes became associated with the Samothracian Mysteries on the island Samothrace is precisely his association with commercial exchanges and the people professionally involved in them. Being an island, a significant number of initiates in these Mysteries seem to have been sailors of the merchant-seamen variety. Having to ply the waves in order to make a living, it would be understandable if the guardian god of both wayfarers and salesmen came to be associated with the deities who offered protection on the open seas with the promise of a blessed afterlife to come.¹⁴

p.80

Aesop's *Fables* often humorously critique the behaviours of those who do business in the *agora*, especially those who seek to gain too much too quickly, and this quite often includes Hermes as well. Thus in one story (*Fabulae* 519) we learn that craftsmen in particular are deceitful because at the direction of Zeus, Hermes administered a drug that made them all so. Unfortunately Hermes (who is the model proportioner in earlier literature) executes his division of the drug very poorly and the poor shoe-makers ended up with many times the portion given to others. Thus, they became the worst liars of all. In another tale (*Fabulae* 562), Hermes enters the shop of a sculptor in the hopes of finding out how much people valued him in relation to the other gods. Asking the man how much his Zeus would cost, and how much his Hera, Hermes then asked how much a statue of his Hermes would be.

Believing himself to be more costly because he enriched mortals, he is taken down a proverbial 'peg or two' when told that if he bought the Zeus and Hera he could have the Hermes for free!

There is one other exchange activity that sits somewhere between a gift and a purchase, and that is the exchange that occurs between two families before and on the day of the marriage between one's son and the other's daughters. Marriages at Athens and elsewhere in Greece were not affairs

of the heart, but far more akin to business transactions. The fathers of the intended couple would have come to an agreement well in advance of the 'big day,' in which the father of the bride agreed to 'loan' his daughter to the son of the other man for the production of legitimate heirs, and in addition to send his daughter along with a pre-agreed-upon dowry, which would eventually be inherited by the sons produced by this union. When the appointed day came, the groom and his well-wishers came with him to the bride's house, and escorted her and her dowry back to his family's home on a wagon. Hermes' involvement here is two-fold: as god of the door, protector of its holdings, he has to agree to let this wealth leave the house, and was thus believed to accompany the bride through the door and release her to the groom. He would also be the god most concerned to see the terms of the exchange agreement fulfilled, in the receipt of whatever benefit the groom's father had pledged to give in return for the bride. So even in the wedding there was an exchange activity over which Hermes, in company with several goddesses, presided.¹⁵

HERMES PHÊLÊTÊS

As with the ancient Greek wedding, usually the exchanges entered into in the *agora* were voluntary transactions in which each person believed he was parting with one thing to gain something else of equal value. However, if it was found that the goods or service for which one paid or swapped were not of the quality or quantity agreed upon at the time of the exchange, this could initiate a new action informed by the principle underlying negative reciprocity, where the things given in exchange are hurtful rather than beneficial to the receivers and where the degree of harm typically escalates in severity with each round of exchanges. Negative reciprocity could also, and indeed was more likely to, originate in relationships founded on the maintenance of generalised reciprocity, given that exchange partners typically viewed one another as friends. If at any point a person started to feel they were putting out significantly more than they were getting back, the relationship between that person and the network might shift into the negative form of exchange.

p.81

Hesiod's *Theogony* presents the tenet governing the gods throughout their generations until Hermes' birth as though it were premised on the dynamics of 'negative' reciprocity. In light of the Hesiodic succession myths, negative reciprocity may even have been the first type of exchange relationship to exist among men as among the gods. It is on account of something owed or held back from someone, such as the denial of

recognition and position owed first to Kronos and then to Zeus, that these two in their turn launch their own assault against their father in *Theogony*. In the case of the *Hymn to Hermes*, it is clearly Hermes' belief that he should be granted some honours as the son of Zeus, where the withholding of *timai* is equated with the theft of *timê* and motivates his raid on Apollo's cattle.¹⁶

Hermes intuitively knows that his theft will necessitate Apollo having to find and confront the thief according to the ethic of negative reciprocity under which the gods have long been operating, and so he deliberately undertakes his theft to force a meeting with his older sibling. When Apollo and Hermes do encounter each other, it is as enemy-strangers (at least from Apollo's perspective). The older brother's first act is to threaten violence and then, somewhat surprisingly, following two 'omens' emitted by Hermes, to laugh and step back from the use of force and threats. Later, after Zeus has sent his two sons back down from Olympos to retrieve the cows, Apollo again attempts to constrain his little brother, this time by binding him with supple strands like those of a willow tree, clearly not yet prepared to settle his dispute with Hermes without inflicting some retaliatory harm.¹⁷

Although Hermes created ways of interacting with others that benefit both parties, he did not foreswear the option to avenge himself on those who did him a disservice. Like his brother's initial response in the *Hymn*, on several occasions we hear of Hermes bringing something unpleasant to some mortal who has offended him either directly or by mistreating one of his descendants or worshippers. Although most of the evidence for tales of this sort is comparatively late, coming as it does from Latin writers of the first century BCE, there is nothing in the tales themselves that would suggest they post-date the composition of the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*. So, for instance, Ovid relates a tale (*Metamorphoses* 2.722–832) about Hermes' vengeance against a sister of one of his love interests when she blocks his entry into the house and attempts to extort a reward from the god for letting him go in. Hermes initially departs but when he returns, Aglauros, having now become insanely envious of her sister, tells the god that she will never move from the door. At this, Hermes simultaneously uses his wand to open the door and fulfil Aglauros' words: as he enters to join Herse, Aglauros slowly turns to stone.

Pausanias, in his tour of the extant religious sites in the Roman province of Achaea, reports a tale told by the inhabitants of Pisa, in the territory formerly known as the city-state of Elis, which they believed to be at least as old as the legendary king Pelops. According to the Eleans, this king dedicated a temple and a sacrifice to Hermes in order to deter the god from seeking vengeance for the death of his son, Myrtilos (5.1.7).

Elsewhere (8.14.10), when in the town of Pellene in the neighbouring region of Arkadia, Pausanias hears of another temple of Hermes, behind which he finds the tomb of Myrtilos: on this occasion he takes the time to tell an abbreviated version of the story of double-dealing that led to Myrtilos' death at the hands of Pelops. In yet another version of this story in the second-century ce mythography Apollodoros (*Bibliothēke* 2.6–9), Pelops is given a legitimate reason for taking Myrtilos' life, while Hermes is given cause for a less direct form of reciprocating retaliation, as his son requests not that he be avenged directly against Pelops, but that Hermes would 'curse' Pelops' own family line.¹⁸

p.82

Perhaps the earliest surviving tale relating to Hermes' use of negative reciprocity comes from a fragment of Hesiod's *Great Eoiai* (= *Catalogue of Women*) preserved by the mythographer Antoninus Liberalis (*Metamorphoses* 23 = *Catalogue of Women*, Fragment 16) mentioned earlier. Hesiod knew of Hermes' encounter with a man named Battos, whom he met as he was driving away the cows stolen from Apollo. Rather than cautioning the man against saying anything about what he has seen, Battos initiates the conversation by saying he will remain as silent as a stone and asking Hermes to reward him for his silence. Agreeing to do so, Hermes carried on, hid the cattle, disguised himself and returned to test Battos' fidelity. Asking Battos if he had seen cows being driven past his location, Hermes took out a robe and offered to give it to him for any information. Battos accepted the robe and reported what he had seen, whereupon Hermes used his wand to transform him into stone. From this tale and that of Aglauros, it would seem Hermes is more than happy to bargain for what he wants, but will not tolerate a breach in the agreement once made. In another tale, preserved only by Antoninus Liberalis (*Metamorphoses* 15), a son of King Merops of the island of Kos was turned into a *charadriion* (a type of bird, possibly a plover, 15.4.6) by Hermes in retaliation for being called a 'thief' (15.2.8); when his father protested, he was turned into a 'long-eared owl, bringer of ill-tidings' (*nuktikoraka kakaggelon* 15.4.7–8).

So Hermes, like many mortals and most gods, is not the least bit hesitant to defend his good name and that of his family's when defamed or offended. Nor is he especially good-natured about having the fulfilment of his own desires delayed by mortal interference. Turning those mortals who break their word to him into stone (perhaps as formless rock rather than statues) would seem to be Hermes' standard way of dealing with this type of breach in a reciprocal relationship. Turning those who defame or otherwise offend against the gods generally

(and Hermes in particular) into birds also seems to be his typical response to such offences.

In other cases, when a failure to reciprocate arises from situations wherein a creature fails to follow through on a promise made for services rendered, Hermes might just as well stand aside and allow events to unfold as they will. This is exemplified in one of Aesop's *Fables* (479) when a raven finds itself caught in a snare for a second time and promises to give Hermes a sacrifice for his aid in freeing him. Hermes in this instance declines to help because he knows that the raven failed to deliver on a similar promise to give Apollo frankincense if he aided the bird in getting free from the very same snare. Having already proven his word unreliable, Hermes leaves him in the snare to suffer whatever may come. Similarly, if the greedy woodsman is any example (Aesop *Fables* 474), should a mortal attempt to gain an undeserved advantage from Hermes through deceit, he will typically end up with less than he started with. Hearing the story of how a fellow woodsman came to possess both a solid gold axe and a silver one, the greedy woodsman threw his own perfectly serviceable axe into the river and sat down on the bank pretending to weep. When Hermes came to him as he had the other man, he heard how this man too had lost his axe in the river. As before, Hermes dove into the river and surfaced with a golden axe. When asked if it was the one he had lost, the greedy man said yes and at that Hermes disappeared, axe and all, leaving the man without any axe whatsoever. The matter could not be put more plainly than it is on a Herm used to convey a warning to travellers against trespassing: if they do so, they will soon know 'how Hermes gives return for evil' (Anonymous, *Epigram* 16.255).

p.83

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Hermes was also venerated as a god of vengeance and associated with the infernal powers of Curse and Arai, who made their home below the earth. His title in this case was *Katochos* ('he who holds down') which is found on a number of leaden curse tablets from Athens and elsewhere in Greece. From the typical prayer to harm another in a particular situation that these tablets contain, it is clear that the inscriber of the curse believes himself to be the offended party and the one against whom the curse is directed is the party who failed to reciprocate appropriately. Several of these curse tablets ask Hermes to have a negative effect on a person's ability to speak in the context of an upcoming court case, bringing into play Hermes' powers as divine *Rhêtôr* and as *Agônaios*, 'God of Contests'.¹⁹

Just as Hermes and Zeus reward those who show the appropriate

hospitality to strangers in need, they punish those who fail to do so. The valley in which Baucis and Philemon lived was full of neighbours who refused to receive the disguised gods and, in recompense, they were swept away along with their homes by the flood waters sent by the gods. In another story, Hermes is sent to punish two young men who do not feed, but literally feed upon, strangers who come to their door. Antoninus Liberalis (*Metamorphoses* 21) reports that Ares persuaded Hermes from the harsh punishment he had intended to inflict and instead agreed to transform the boys into birds of ill-omen: Oreios into an eagle owl and Argios into a vulture (21.5.4–9). Even their mother, Polyphontê (21.5.1–4), is transformed into a small species of owl, which, as in her former life, is for all intents and purposes speechless, along with the family's serving woman (21.6.1–5), who was turned into a woodpecker. This, however, was not a bird portending evil because Hermes, understanding that her independent action was constrained, honoured her prayer not to become such a bird.

OVERVIEW

To say that Hermes is the god of the marketplace is certainly true, but in saying that there is a tendency to think of him only in relation to the common, everyday monetary transactions in which people around the world engage almost daily, the sort of activity we associate most with retail sales. While this is a very important aspect of Hermes' status as the Lord of Exchanges, there are others which are equally if not more important than transactions conducted with money. An early form of exchange, still practised in the world today, is that of bartering (or less nobly called 'haggling') for a good or service. With this exchange type it is necessary for the person wishing to acquire something to engage more directly with the person seeking to part with that thing, leaving more of an opening for a relationship to develop than typically available for persons simply seeking to purchase something.

p.84

Perhaps even more important than the opportunities to interact with another in the process of bartering are those which open up in the area of gift-giving. This too is a form of exchange that falls under Hermes' lordship. By introducing gift-giving into the world, he created a way for mortals to show not only their respect for the gods but also their respect for one another; and because gifts to the gods demonstrate respect, they reveal a mortal's desire to be in a cordial, reciprocating relationship with the god. The ability to enter into such reciprocal exchanges thus forms the

basis of the sacrificial system, through which mortals maintain communication with the gods and with each other. It might be said, then, that Hermes' Lordship over Exchange gives him oversight of a rather large segment of human (and divine) interactions.

NOTES

- 1 On hymns as valued offerings to the gods, see now Calame (2011), with further references.
- 2 For the uniqueness of Hermes' association with feasts, see Clay (1987); S. Johnston (2002); Versnel (2011: ch. 4). The offer made to the tortoise is presented as though Hermes were offering her a gift. See Mauss' (1990 [1967]) seminal study on the obligatory factor in the giving and receiving of gifts.
- 3 For the role of reciprocal giving in the creation and maintenance of friendships in ancient Greece, see Herman (1987). On Hermes *Ktēnitēs*, see Georgoudi (2010).
- 4 For an extended discussion of Hermes' 'sacrifice' see Versnel (2011: 319–24). On the mixture of elements from different sacrificial rituals in Hermes' killing and the preparation of the meal as *xeneia* ('feast honouring a guest') see Burkert (1984: 836–9). In Clay's view (1987) Hermes creates the first 'feast' (*dais*) as a model for mortal feasting; for Kahn (1978: 60–1), the total confusion of sacrificial elements makes Hermes' activity inappropriate as a founding event of human activity. The distribution by lot does not in itself indicate that all portions are equal, only that the will of the gods is involved in determining who gets each portion. However, the giving of a *geras* to each portion means that whatever their individual size, each of the *recipients* is equally worthy of honour. Following Burkert (1984), Clay (1987: 223) comments on this contradiction; Kahn (1978: 60–1) sees the lack of a clear hierarchy in the divisions equal to a lack of clear boundaries between humans and gods; however, as Kerényi observes (1963: 54), there is nothing in the action to indicate Hermes has humans in mind at all, although he believes this is because mortals do not yet exist. On this point, see Patton (2009: 112). Given that at Olympia there are six altars, each shared by two gods (Zeus/Poseidon, Hera/Athena, Artemis/Aphrodite, Dionysos/the Charities, Kronos/Rhea) with Hermes and Apollo sharing one, several scholars see it as the location of the *Hymn*'s first performance (e.g., Clay 1989: 119–27; Burkert 1984); Larson (2016: 29) does too, but acknowledges the difficulties of this position (52, n.34). Johnston and Mulroy (2009), following Brown (1969), see the twelve gods of Athens as the recipients, further arguing that the *Hymn* is a tribute/'gift' to the Athenian craftsmen who, like Hermes, were inventive and contributed so much to the fame of the city. See also: Pausanias (5.14.4–10); Pindar *Olympian* (5.1–7); Apollodoros (*Bibliothēke* 2.7.5). *Theoxenia* is a compound term, composed of *Theo(s)* = god + *xenos* = host, guest and stranger; *xenia* => 'guest-rights' or 'hospitality'; on *theoxenia* generally, see Jameson (1994); on *theoxenia* in the *Hymn*, see Leduc (2005) with earlier scholarship.

- 5 For discussion of the Paul and Barnabas incident, see Martin (1995); Klauck (1994); for discussion of Ovid's Baucis and Philemon, see Griffin (1991).
- 6 On the importance of birth-order, see for example Clay (1989); Harrell (1991). See

- also Kurke (1999: 104; 1995: 33–7), who notes other instances of songs as gifts in the system of exchange. On the way in which the beauty and pleasure of feast and song are embedded in relationships of reciprocity and *charis*, see Nagy (1989: 21); also *Odyssey* (9.3–11, esp. line 5). On other dedications to Hermes/Mercury by Associations or their members, see Ascough and Kloppenberg (2012).
- 7 Hermes shares his love of the tortoise with Aphrodite, his love of the ram with Apollo. For Aphrodite, the tortoise may have represented a particular style of head-wear that could lie in folds around the neck when taken down, but when raised, covered a woman's head closely like a shell. On this and other female veiling practices in ancient Greece, see Llewellyn-Jones (2003).
 - 8 Later sources, in attempting to explain certain astronomical phenomena, make one variety of hawk a favourite of the god's as well as the hare, due to their prolific reproduction (see [Chapter 7](#)). Pseudo-Apollodoros' *Epitome* (3.2.11) reports that Hermes also gave a golden-fleeced sheep to Atreus of the Argolid as a symbol of his right to rule and one suspects that this may once have been a ram, given that both it and gold are associated with rulership. On these stories, see Orgogozo (1949: 10–30); on gold as the metal symbolic of rulership, see Kurke (1995, 1999).
 - 9 A story preserved in the Eustathius' *Commentary ad Odysseas* (19.518) rehearses the theft of a golden dog which was recovered by Hermes, while Antoninus Liberalis (*Metamorphoses* 36) and Pausanias (8.53.4) report that a son of Hermes, named Kydon, was suckled by a dog. See also Raingaerd (1934: 359–60). Parker (1996: 182) sees Hermes' role in Asklepias' Piraeus cult as 'Leader of Dreams'; for the decree from the Piraeus Asklepion, see Hübbe (1959). For an interesting study of the place of dogs in Roman thought, which follows that of the Greeks on many points, see Burriss (1935).
 - 10 For a cow as the standard against which substitutability was assessed see *Iliad* (6.234–6). For ownership of cattle and herd-size as the measure of honour due, see Athanassakis (1992); Bakker (2013); also J. Nagy (1983: 195) who recognises the song-for-cattle compensatory relationship. Steiner (1994: 44) correctly notes that the song alleviates Apollo's anger but takes Hermes' receipt of cattle as a result of the lyre-exchange rather than the song itself. Kahn (1978: 124) misses the song-for-cattle exchange and takes it as cattle-for-lyre, which she also characterises as a 'business contract'. In another context, on the archaic poet's critique of the 'commodification of song', see Kurke (1991: 225–39); von Reden (1995b: 30–50); Gentili (1998: 55–76). On the importance of desire as a motivator to exchange, see, among others, Buchan (1997: esp. ch. 1); Girard (1989: esp. 145–9, 153–9); Humphrey and Hugh-Jones (1992). For desire as a trick, see Kahn (1978). For extended discussion on forms of exchange, see Humphrey and Hugh-Jones (1992); von Reden (1995a).
 - 11 Bungard (2011: 159), following Brown (1969: 38), adopts this view. In Heiden's interpretation (2010: 411), the value of Apollo's friendship ranks higher than maintaining strict equality in the value of the gifts. It may be added that 'strict equality' in gifts would do nothing to establish a friendship; rather, it would indicate that they viewed each other as parties to a commercial transaction with no need or desire to have any continuing relationship thereafter.
 - 12 See Hesiod, *Works and Days* (349–51); *Iliad* (6.234–6). Mitchell (1997: 20) notes: 'gift-exchange in its balanced forms . . . can be dependent on equivalence (or near equivalence) of value in the exchange, and this is particularly true of *xenia*'. On the

use of oaths in ancient Greece see, for example, Burkert (1985: 250–4); Cole (1996); and the essays contained in Sommerstein and Fletcher (2007).

- 13 On the sacred status of the *agora*, Camp (1996: 51); on Hermes *Agoraios* at Athens, see Osanna (1992).
- 14 On the Samothracian Mysteries, see Blakely (2007, 2012); most scholars now agree that Hermes was not (initially, if ever) actually one of the gods worshipped in this cult. See Constantakopoulou (2015: especially 282).
- 15 For the first discussion of Hermes' relationship to the wedding, see Vernant (1983: 127–75); for a modern take on the relationship between Hermes (god of exchange) and Hestia (goddess of conservation) see P. Thompson (2002).
- 16 On the dynamics of negative reciprocity see Sahlins (1968); Seaford (1994: 25–9); Donlan (1982: 141–3). J. Nagy (1983: 192) draws a parallel between theft and 'natural' (i.e., pre-cultural) states in contrast to 'culture' and generalised reciprocity associated with gift-giving. By this route, Hermes in many analyses is a culture hero by virtue of introducing new ways by which people are able to relate to each other. See, for instance, Hyde (1999); Burkert (1984); Brown (1969). On the taking of one's inheritance by force as the recovery of a debt, see Cohen (1983: 27). For discussion of Nestor's raid in *Iliad* as reciprocal response to theft, see Lintott (1982: ch. 1); Walcott (1978). Contrary to this view, Lincoln (1976: 64) sees Hermes' raid as unprovoked, although Hermes is clearly aware that he and his mother have been neglected or denied the receipt of offerings and prayers due the gods (*Hymn to Hermes* 4.167–9).
- 17 On the use of threats in the *Hymn* see Harrell (1991). The two deterrents employed by Hermes – a fart and a sneeze – against Apollo's threats were each viewed as involuntary signs with prophetic import.
- 18 Here we have an explanation for the troubles experienced by Pelopodai ('sons of Pelops') Atreus and Thyestes, and their sons Agamemnon, Menelaos and Aigisthos which are so well represented in fifth-century Athenian tragedy. Later sources tell us that in further recompense, Hermes places Myrtilos in the sky as the constellation known as the charioteer (see Pseudo-Hyginus *Fabulae* 224; *Astronomica* 2.13).
- 19 See, for example, Faraone (1985); chapters in Faraone and Obbink (1991); Gager (1992); Curbera and Jordan (1998); Elderkin (1936).



5

TRANSPPOSITIONS

When Hermes is granted authority to oversee all forms of exchange, one might not expect that oversight to include the nefarious activity of theft, given that it would initially seem to involve only one actor and no real transaction; that is, no exchange of goods. However, this multi-faceted god is able to transpose himself into the role of his own opposite, to better demonstrate the value of honouring his more benign talents. If Hermes is the first gift-giver, he is also the first successful thief. Perhaps this is because it was not the cows that Hermes actually wanted, but what they represented: from the perspective of both gods and mortals the loss of cattle was a serious matter, as each group viewed them as prestige goods which should be owned only by those held in honour among them. Hermes' transposition of the cows was a perfect illustration of what he wanted from his father.¹

THE THIEF

There can be no doubt that Hermes begins life acting like a thief: he takes Apollo's fifty cows without his knowledge or permission, and later threatens to become an eternal thief existing outside the pantheon if his father refuses to grant him honours the equal of those given to the brother from whom he appropriates the cows (*Hymn to Hermes* 173–5). That his thieving abilities continued to be recognised is borne out by the existence of two festivals, primarily in the eastern Greek islands, where 'Hermes the Thief' received cult: on the island of Chios, Hermes was worshipped as *Kleptes* and on the island of Samos, the people held a one-day festival during which they were permitted to steal something from each other's homes in honour of Hermes *Charidotes* 'Giver of Favour' (Plutarch, *Greek Questions* 55). These may be grounded in a long-established worship of Hermes based on tales older than the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*, which itself

seems to be a later version of Hermes' poaching of Apollo's cows; significantly, his conditional threat to become a regular thieving figure in his father's cosmos is related only here. Other poets tell the story differently.²

Antoninus Liberalis (first/second century ce), for instance, has preserved in his *Metamorphoses* (23) several lines from the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 256) – now considered to be a sixth-century BCE work – which relate the tale of Hermes' theft of Apollo's cattle and his encounter with a man named Battos as he drives those cattle homeward. He also indicates that he is familiar with two other poets who had composed on the same theme in addition to Apollodoros, and this information serves as evidence for us that the theft of the cows was a popular theme. In another treatment of Hermes' exploits, entitled the *Birth of Hermes* by the sixth-century poet, Alkaios of Lesbos, the god steals not only Apollo's cattle, but also his bow. We have only the first three lines of this poem and the first word of the fourth; however, both Philostratos (*Imagines* 25) and a scholiast on *Iliad* (15.265) indicate familiarity with the story, as does Pausanias (7.20.4), while according to Porphyry, the Roman poet Horace based his *Odes* (1:10) (which we do have) on Alkaios' account in his hymn (Page 1979: 252–8).

p.88

These are not the only variations to occur in the recounting of Hermes' theft; however, as is clear from the surviving content or descriptions of these other treatments of the tale, the storyline in *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* differs from other versions on several points. Whereas in the *Homeric Hymn*, significant emphasis is laid on the extreme youthfulness of the god, there is no indication of Hermes' age in the Pseudo-Hesiodic version, nor is there any mention of the lyre. The cattle of Apollo are not said to be grazing on the slopes of Pieria, but more generally on Thessalian slopes along with the herds of King Admetos and, when Hermes arrives, he steals not only more than *one hundred* of Apollo's cows (as compared to the *Hymn's* fifty) but his bull as well. His encounter with a man, actually given a name in the Hesiodic version (Battos), occurs at a different location in his journey, while his interaction with him is far more involved than the similar encounter with the unnamed old man of the *Hymn*. As noted previously, Battos successfully blackmails Hermes, demanding a reward for his silence; however, after sequestering the stolen cattle in a cave, Hermes returns in disguise and offers Battos a reward for information about the thief. The latter accepts the offer, reveals what he knows and is immediately turned to stone as punishment for his breaking faith with the god. The narrative ends here and we have no information as

to how Apollo responded to the theft or of how Hermes treated the cows thereafter.

Epic and lyric poets were not the only ones to deal with the tale of Hermes' cattle theft. At some point in the mid- to late fifth century, the tragic playwright, Sophokles, composed a satyr-play based on this early incident in Hermes' career which included his creation of the lyre. Almost half of this play, called *Ichneutai* (*Searchers*), survives. As in our *Hymn*, Apollo is at a loss as to what has become of his cows, having failed to find them on his own. In his desperation, the 'prophetic' god must hire a team of satyrs to aid in the search. Eventually, they do find evidence of the herd's likely location, being drawn to the vicinity by the unfamiliar and terrifying sound of the newly invented lyre. The dialogue indicates that Hermes has employed parts of the cows in the creation of his new musical instrument. Much later still we have Apollodoros' retelling of the myth (3.10.2) which has more in common with elements from Sophokles' satyr-play than with the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*, for as in *Ichneutai*, the theft of Apollo's cattle precedes Hermes' creation of the lyre and the cows are subsequently used in its creation.

At present, there is no way to determine how long the tale of Hermes' theft had been in existence, but it is most certainly one that remained attached to the god throughout the ages. It seems to have become a common assumption that Hermes' favour was bestowed on thieves or on certain 'tricky' characters since at least the Age of Heroes of which Homer wrote – the Bronze Age. Although Homer does not report a father-son relationship between Hermes and Autolykos, he does acknowledge that the latter received favour from the god in the area of deceptive language skills and thieving as a result of the many lambs and kids Autolykos had offered to him in sacrifice (*Odyssey* 19.396–432). The sixth-century poet, Pherekydes, was familiar with this story of their reciprocal *philia*, as were other poets of later centuries, both Greek and Roman. Pseudo-Hyginus (*Fabulae* 201) adds details not provided by Homer, such as Hermes' gifting to Autolykos the ability to change the appearance of the thing stolen (i.e., its colour and some other external features) so as to avoid detection as the possessor of stolen property. Unfortunately, he was eventually outsmarted by another clever fellow, named Sisypchos, who placed a mark on his animals' hooves, permitting them to be identified among Autolykos' flocks.

Hermes' association with thieves is even (reputedly) employed by Aesop in Babrius' rehearsal of it in *Fable* 521; here the connection is not

made in order to mock the god himself, but rather to paint another group in a bad light. It begins with Hermes wheeling a cart full of various kinds of dishonest words and tricks which he intends to distribute among the tribes of men. While in the land of the Arabs, the cart became immovable, and this allowed the locals to raid the cart and steal all of its remaining contents. In the view of the fable's author, this accounts for the lying and double-dealing of this group who gained more than their fair share of Hermes' 'gifts' on that day. Hermes is not to blame for this situation, but he is presented as the god with the authority to spread 'lying and double-dealing' throughout the known world.

THE TRICKSTER

It is clear from this late fable that Hermes' association with 'trickiness' was part and parcel of his lordship over forms of exchange. Just as he is the god who oversees the agreed-to exchanges of both tangible and intangible goods, so Hermes is also the god who oversees the unexpected loss of such goods; likewise, he is the god who both protects boundaries and has oversight of their violation. When these two aspects of his *timai* become the focus, Hermes begins to show some similarity with a figure encountered in the folklore and mythologies of peoples the world over: the trickster.

The figures identified as being 'tricksters' in their own culture's tales do not all possess the same characteristics or *modus operandi*, nor are they all divine beings; nevertheless, they are understood to fulfil the same functions within their respective pantheons. Frequently, the 'trickster' is an insider on the outside who wants to be let in. Thus, he may be the son of a god or mortal ruler who is side-lined by his family. In an effort to gain recognition and to be included, he becomes a 'prankster', repeatedly violating the rules of his society and their expected behavioural norms. His behaviour can be overtly sexual or scatological in his play with gender norms, body parts and bodily secretions. In conjunction with this, he may also be an inventor, a figure whose creative energies, in the process of breaking the rules, actually serve to advance mortal (and occasionally, divine) society. He is able to raise a laugh by the way he goes about things, as well as by the almost inevitable way in which he becomes the butt of his own tricks and jokes. Because of these aspects in his story-lines and personas, 'trickster' is often equated with the 'culture hero' and the 'fool'.

Greek trickster god and culture hero rolled into one. He was a Titan, of the generation prior to Zeus' own, and the cleverest god of his own generation. However, like most of the world's trickster figures, when he attempted to out-smart Zeus, (ostensibly) for the benefit of mortal men, his big trick back-fired to his own detriment and to that of men's as well. Hesiod goes on to narrate the sequence of events precipitated by the failure of Prometheus' trick: although Prometheus did steal fire from Zeus so that men might roast their meat, Zeus punished men by sending them a new object of desire, the woman, Pandora (*Works and Days* 50–105). The fifth-century Athenian playwright, Aeschylus, wrote a set of plays dealing with Prometheus' attempt to get the better of the chief Olympian. In the one that survives, the Titan rehearses all the benefits he had bestowed on humanity before being subjected to Zeus' punishments (*Prometheus Bound* 235–56). Decades later the philosopher, Plato, would write a dialogue in which the sophist, Protagoras, offers another version of Prometheus' aid to men. It seems he, like Hermes, had a creative streak and worked as a benefactor to humanity, qualifying himself as a 'culture hero' in the process.³

Zeus himself has much in common with trickster, and his natural abilities are only further enhanced when he is able to swallow Mêtis by means of a trick: Hera recognises that he is cut from the trickster's cloth when, in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (322), she calls him *poikilometa*, 'variously cunning', essentially 'tricky' due to his 'devising' (*mêtiomoi*) to ingest the impregnated Mêtis to give birth himself. Clearly, he is rather a schemer in his own right, just as he schemed to produce an equally 'clever' son with Maia.

So Hermes, as presented in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*, is the creator of a number of things, both objects and activities, which are to the betterment of both human and divine societies, clearly revealing him to share in the 'culture hero' side of 'trickster' tales. While doing so he also 'crosses the line' of a few societal norms, which is another activity most closely linked with the trickster, whose boundary-crossing can either serve to destroy, to move or to reaffirm the need for the societal boundary he transgressed. Hermes certainly does have a number of epithets to support an interpretation of him as the Greek 'trickster', but these, not surprisingly, are granted him by Apollo, the person who believes himself to be most violated by Hermes' activity in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*. At various times his brother calls Hermes *Klepsiphron* ('Deceiver', 'Dissembler'), *Mêkhaniôtês* ('Trickster', 'Contriver'), *Phêlêtês* ('Thief', 'Robber', 'Rustler'), *Arkhos Phêlêteôn* ('Leader of Robbers'), *Poikilomêtês* ('of Various Wiles'), *Polytropos* ('Many-Wayed', 'of Many-Turning') and *Poneomenos* ('Busy One'). The *Hymn's* narrator is not nearly as forthcoming in his use of such 'titles', restricting himself to just three

among the string of descriptors with which he opens the god's birth narrative: he is a god of 'winning wiles,' a 'robber' and 'thief at the gates' (13-15). Elsewhere the narrator describes Hermes as doing and thinking things often associated with the trickster's ways of interacting in the world: he is said to be 'pondering a stratagem in his breast of the sort that / deceptive men employ . . . under the cover of darkness' (65-7) when planning his nighttime raid on Apollo's cows; when he is deciding how to remove the cows from Pieria the narrator calls his plan a 'clever ruse' (76); in attempting to dissuade Apollo of the idea that he is the thief, we are told that he is attempting 'to deceive' his brother with 'wily words' (317); and he is 'evil-plotting' as he stands before his father at the conclusion of his self-defence (390-1). Thus, it is the violated figure who hurls the most trickster-like epithets at Hermes, while the narrator merely acknowledges the young god as especially adept in the use of words and sleight of hand.

p.91

Another poet of the sixth century, named Hipponax, wrote a very different style of poetry, called invective; that is, poems designed to insult and humiliate the subject named in the verses. He is both sarcastic and ironic, as well as 'base' in his language and his material, describing inappropriate sexual acts most crudely. Styling himself as an outsider, it is perhaps not surprising that we find him frequently making reference to or invoking Hermes in his poems, especially as a patron of thieves. In one he even requests that Hermes procure a woollen coat, new footwear and some money for him [fr. 32 West]; in another, after jokingly insulting the god by calling him the thief's friend, he requests his assistance in a thieving act [fr. 3a West]; in still others, he opens with words of praise for the god as though he were his personal friend and assistant [fr. 35 West; fr. 79, 9, 177; fr. 472]. As one socially disruptive outsider to another, Hipponax invokes Hermes because he sees them as having much in common. Hermes, however, is clearly a key member of the Pantheon and apart from the *Hymn* and invective poems, there is no later poem in which he is presented as being a thief. Nevertheless, the display of other abilities associated with thievishness continued to appear in his stories, in particular his innate and highly refined ability to conceal and deceive.

Getting away with an unauthorised act is the goal of the thief. In this, the ability to conceal, to misrepresent, to deceive seems to be the aspect of Hermes' persona that underlines his epithet *Dolios*, and this is certainly in keeping with the activities of the trickster. He bears the epithet in a number of genres of poetry, including tragedy (Sophokles, *Philoktetes* 1331; [Pseudo]-Euripides, *Rhesus* 217) and comedy (Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazussai* 1202), and it continues to be reported in the prose of

such authors as Aeneas Tacitus (24.15) and Pausanias (7.21.1) as well as being engraved in stone (*SEG* 37.1673). But deception comes in two forms, and Hermes shows himself to be most proficient in each.

VERBAL DECEPTION

It was noted previously that Hermes is a wordsmith and a master orator. While today the ability to speak well in public is generally admired, the fifth-century Athenians saw reason to be suspicious of the elegant speaker, due in part to the appearance of philosophers known as Sophists. According to their opponents, from whom the majority of our knowledge about them comes, the Sophists professed to teach men how to be excellent public speakers, even to the point of showing them how to make the weakest case the strongest – that is, how to convince people to undertake a course of action that may be to their own detriment, but to the benefit of the speaker himself. Clearly this was a form of deception which could not be allowed to flourish at Athens, where making a proposal for a course of action before the Assembly was part of performing your civic duty to your fellow citizens. As the dispute between Diodotos and Kleon recorded in Thucydides (3.41–8) reveals, disingenuous advice undermined the very basis of Athenian democracy and was not to be tolerated. Although neither speaker mentions either Sophists or Hermes in this debate, it is clear that the skills that each could employ were viewed as the worst form of deceit.

p.92

A similar sense of suspicion attended all those who spoke one or more languages in addition to Greek. Often such people were Heralds, serving officially in the capacity as ambassadors on missions to negotiate peace, among other things. One would think that being able bridge a linguist barrier which prevented parties from speaking directly to one another was a positive thing; however, either side or both could be left with the suspicion that the ‘translator’ was not reporting what the other speaker had said or was not reporting what he himself had said correctly. Being multi-lingual seemed to impart a perception that one had greater power to deceive. Thus Hermes, as the Olympian Herald par excellence, under the right circumstances can be viewed as the divine deceiver par excellence as well.⁴

Given Hermes’ ability to manipulate his audience by means of the spoken word and the inherent possibility of being deceived, it is perhaps suggestive that the one oracle of Hermes about which we know did not

permit the god to speak. Nevertheless, it still retains an element of potential misdirection: in the marketplace at Pharai, the inquirer had to whisper his question in the ear of Hermes' Herm and then leave the *agora* with his ears covered. Such concealing of one's words in the presence of others would normally arouse feelings of mistrust: today, it is not uncommon to call people who whisper in the presence of others 'rude', primarily because whispering causes suspicions to arise which may work to destabilise the unity of the group: there is something 'tricky' about both the whisperer and the whisper. The only other gods who share in the 'Whisperer' epithet are Aphrodite and Eros, two deities with whom Hermes has close associations and who were frequently viewed as deceptive and potentially destructive powers in the realm of human relations.⁵

This particular oracle of Hermes also had the potential to be doubly suspicious because the answer to the whispered question came through the act of overhearing words meant for someone else's ears: it was given the name *kledonomancy*, because a prophecy (the '*mancy*' part, related to *mantis* = 'prophet') consisted in 'chance words' ('*klêdôn*'). Whether the inquirer believed that Hermes somehow assisted in the interpretation of the things said is not stated – but the nature of the oracle highlights the way the spoken word can be heard to contain different meanings for different auditors. Perhaps this is one way in which the Greeks understood Hermes' *Dolios* epithet. Words can be 'tricky' and Hermes is the god of the spoken word. Certainly, if the first words one hears do not seem to fit one's question, or one's interpretation of those words turns out to be incorrect, it is easy to see how Hermes' poetic epithet, *Klepsiphron* ('Deceiver', 'Dissembler'), might arise. Despite this, enough people seem to have felt the oracle 'worked' often enough to continue to use it, as each inquirer made what was heard 'fit' the question asked.



Figure 5.1 ‘Hermes killing the hundred-eyes Argos, guardian of Io’, fifth century BCE

Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

Hermes may also employ a sound to deceive in another way: the alluring sound of music to distract and disarm an opponent. This is certainly what he does in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* in order to replace Apollo’s anger with feelings of longing and desire to hear and to have the lyre. In another tale, Hermes uses the pipes he invented after trading the lyre for other benefits in order to disarm an even more hostile opponent

In order to take Io away from Argos Panoptes ('All-Eyes' = 'All-Seeing'), the guardian set over her as watchman by Hera, Hermes charmed him to the point of sleep with his enchanting pipe-playing. This was necessary because it was said that at least one of his many eyes always remained open: but even this last one was closed in the relaxing comfort of Hermes' music, so that Hermes could slay the monster and make off with the maiden (Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 566–75; Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.613–20). Here aural deception facilitates a different sort of 'mazing' of someone's eyes.

VISUAL DECEPTION

If words can be deceptive, it turns out that what one sees is no less subject to misapprehension. As modern studies have shown, several people may view the same event and report it very differently. Having one's eyes wide open does not guarantee that one will see clearly. This may be what Aeschylus means when he has his chorus refer to Hermes as 'drawing the darkness over men's eye with words at night / and by day he is no more clear at all' (*Libation Bearers* 815–17). We would expect to hear of Hermes' wand here, as this is the instrument in Homer by which Hermes closes men's eyes in sleep and wakes them again. But perhaps what Homer does not tell us is that Hermes utters incantations which work in conjunction with the wand; the term he uses when describing what Hermes does with his wand means 'to beguile, enchant' and otherwise 'confuse' the eyes of men. In light of this it is important to recognise the equivalency between closing one's eyes in sleep and the loss of one's ability to see clearly. It could well be that when Hermes 'closes men's eyes' he does not necessarily put them to sleep; rather, he may just prevent them from perceiving what is going on right before their eyes. Thus, according to Aeschylus, the wand in conjunction with what Hermes says can prevent men from seeing clearly even in the bright light of day.⁶

Perhaps another potentially deceptive aspect of Hermes' relationship with sleep is his status as the 'bringer' (or 'leader') of dreams. Dreams are typically experienced visually, although there may be the impression of accompanying sound in some instances. Whether they have an aural quality or not, dreams are seldom ever straightforward and thus require interpreting; but getting the interpretation of visual images correct, as has been noted for verbal communication, can be an exercise fraught with

difficulty. The matter is further complicated by Penelope's observation in the *Odyssey* (19:562–7) that there are two gates through which dreams pass on their way to the dreamer; one releases true dreams and the other false. If Hermes is the 'leader of dreams,' is it he who decides through which gate to lead each dream? Or is he the leader of only one sort of dream? And if so, which sort of dream does he lead? Whatever the answer, it would seem that the chance of being deceived by the night-visions guided by Hermes is great indeed.⁷

In the waking world of action, Hermes makes use of a different visual 'trick' in the cult story told by the Tanagrans about Hermes *Promachos* which has a much closer affinity with the trickster's actions in the tales from elsewhere. In this tale, Hermes and the ephebes appears harmless enough with their gymnastic body-scraper, the strigil, in hand. But looks can be and are deceiving in this instance, as the god and Tanagra's youth rout the invading Euboians, who are caught by surprise due to their failure to see the lethal potential of this knife-like tool and the fighting skill of the youths who wield it (Jaillard 2007b: 145).

The Tanagran cult tale does not state that Hermes meant to deceive the invaders in his choice of weapon, unlike Dolon (whose name means 'wolf'), a character in the tragedy *Rhesus* (attributed to Euripides). He reveals that he fully intends to use a visual ruse to deceive those who may see him making his way to the Achaian camp; he will leave different sets of tracks in deserted spots than those left elsewhere (214–18). In response, the chorus pray that Hermes, lord of thieves, be his escort there and back again. Here the playwright is most certainly referring to Hermes' own footprints ruse in the *Hymn*, given that both he and Dolon are attempting to get away with stealing something by disguising their tracks.

p.95

Even mothers were not averse to making use of Hermes and his deceptive tactics when they needed their children to obey. Kallimachos (*Hymn 3 to Artemis*, 66–7) describes how a mother calls upon Hermes, who comes, 'coated in dark ashes, from the inner-most reaches of the house' and frightens her little girl into obedience. Here it seems the mother's words and the child's imagination work in tandem to effect the desired result: the disobedient child seeks the comfort and protection of her mother's arms and becomes more obedient in the process.

The sudden, mysterious, almost magical appearance of Hermes from the darkness, like the very term 'maze' used of the effects of Hermes' wand on the eyes, suggests that at least some elements of magic were

under Hermes' control. To daze, confuse, perplex and bewilder would all serve as equally appropriate translations of Homer's term describing the wand's effect on those on whom Hermes uses it as well as on those who witness it in operation. However, apart from the case Brown (1969) made that Hermes was once a 'magician god,' there is little evidence to suggest that the post-Homeric Greeks would have seen him in that light. This is not to say that his actions have no affinity with magic. He is, after all, the one who seems to know the secret properties of plants, as in the case of the '*moly*' Hermes plucks for Odysseus to protect him from Kirke's own vile drug (*Odyssey* 10.286–8, 302–6). This may suggest that Hermes used 'god-speak,' a language little known to the humans, who know only a few words of it, such as *moly* and *planktai* and *ambrosia*, without wholly understanding to what they refer (Clay 1972). But to our ear and perhaps to the ancient audiences' as well, the statement seems to imply that Hermes has a mastery of magical words. If that were not the case generally, it certainly was the case in specific periods and areas.⁸

We have evidence in the form of small strips of lead, which have been inscribed, then rolled up and pierced with a nail (or nails) and buried, that Hermes was invoked by the epithet *Katachos* ('he who holds down') in the making of curses from at least as early as the mid- to late fifth century BCE at Athens. Faraone (1985) has shown that many of these 'curses' are uttered against opponents involved in legal disputes, some requesting that their opponent not be able to speak well or at all, others that the individual might happen upon some misfortune before their court appearance. Similarly, as the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* reveals, Hermes understands oaths and how to avoid perjuring himself. Like the lead curses, the swearing of oaths, which often ended in the pronouncement of a curse upon the swearer if he failed to fulfil his words, was considered to work by means of word-magic. The *Hymn* also implies that Hermes can bind and loose physically as well as verbally when it describes how the new god caused the withes with which Apollo intended to bind his brother to fall away and take root in the ground (408–14). Similarly, the silence of the dogs on his return home (145) suggests that he had this power well before he received the wand from Apollo with which he is usually said to silence and make sleep whomever he wills.⁹

Also a form a magical ability, somewhat akin to his emergence from the darkness in Kallimachos' *Hymn*, is Hermes' apparent ability to be a shape-shifter. Again the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* barely hints at this ability when it describes Hermes' re-entry into his home 'like a wisp of smoke through the key-hole' (145–7); however, in his appearing now as an infant, now an adolescent when he slaughters the two cows, now an infant again when he returns to his cradle and when he appears before Zeus, Hermes reveals his ability to make himself visible in whatever form best suits the

occasion. It is also possible to view his Herms as possessing a certain magical ability to protect the entry-ways at which they stood.¹⁰

p.96

In comparison with the magic found in many of the world's trickster tales, Hermes' forms of 'magic' appear quite tame. It is also true that, unlike the results of magic's use by other tricksters, there does not seem to be an instance where the magic 'backfires' on Hermes as it can often do on other such figures.

IMMODESTY AND EXCESSES

Despite this difference, Hermes shares similarities with another of the trickster's proclivities and it is one which seems to have the greatest consistency across cultures: his total disregard for social niceties, especially those associated with modesty and shame. Many if not most tricksters like 'dirty jokes', public displays of nudity and uninhibited sexual congress, as well as responding to the 'call of the wild' wherever and whenever it comes. It is quite possible that Hermes' ithyphallic image is a residual aspect of his earlier status as trickster; Pausanias (6.26.5) reports that at Kyllene their Hermes is represented solely by an erect phallus, while one vase painter of the fifth century BCE made great play with this feature of the Herm, creating an oversized phallus on which a bird has decided to perch (*LIMC* 5.2, no. 94, of 470–60 BCE).

The Hellenistic poet, Kallimachos, made euphemistic play with this feature of the Herm when he wrote (*Iambus* IX):

Hermes, why is your 'stick' oh Bearded one,

[aimed at] your beard and not your feet?

According to the author of the *Diegesis*, this fragment comes from a longer poem in which the poet reportedly had Hermes claim 'Tyrrenian descent' and attribute his ithyphallic form to a 'mystic story' (presumably the one mentioned by Herodotos, 2.51), concerning the Samothracian Mysteries. Trypanis (1978: 137) comments that both *Iambus* IX and *Iambus* VII 'treat of the cult of Hermes, and in both instances the statue is the source of information'. In a similar vein, in a play, possibly by Phrynichos (fr. 61, Storey vol. 3), Hermes is a speaking character involved in a joke about protecting his ithyphallic member from breaking should he fall over, an event which might then give cause for someone to falsely

accuse another of impiously damaging his statue. A few names are dropped in the course of the ensuing conversation and taken together it is clear that the entire scene is meant to mock the initial fallout from the mutilation of the Herms incident at Athens of 415 BCE.

Another residual aspect of the trickster may be seen in Hermes' willingness to risk public humiliation and the unbreakable bonds of Hephaistos' net to be trapped in the arms of Aphrodite (*Odyssey* 8.335–42). Of course, as the god who can bind and loose, he had no real need to fear Hephaistos' bonds; but he can use them as an excuse to remain 'trapped' for an extended period of time in the goddess' embrace. Even the second-century ce satirist, Lucian, finds this episode too delicious to ignore and writes an entire dialogue (*Dialogues of the Gods*, 21) based on it, wherein Hermes is the one who invites Apollo to come and see Ares and Aphrodite 'caught in the act.' In the real world of Greek religion, it was not unusual to find Aphrodite and Hermes together in cult, as at Argos and at Kato Syme on Crete, while in other tales these two are lovers themselves, who produce the beautiful youth Hermaphroditos.¹¹

p.97

Just as Hermes is not the least bit bothered by self-exposure, in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* the god's willingness to 'show and tell' is revealed in the 'shameless' song he sings about his parents' love affair, which may also stand as a very toned-down reminiscence of the overtly and inappropriate displays of sexuality to be found in other trickster tales from around the world. Similarly, his 'belch' and 'fart' are equally reserved versions of the explicit relationship of other tricksters to bodily functions, especially excrement. Bain (2007: 51–2) sees the Hermes' poet's description of these bodily functions as 'breaches in the rules of epic' but also notes that the terms used are not those of 'everyday language' either: the audience can laugh without having to take offence from the use of cruder forms of expression.

If Homer and the *Hymn* are somewhat reserved in their portrayal of Hermes' immodesty and excesses, an epigram in the *Palatine Anthology* (12: 149) more cryptically implicates Hermes in a lover's efforts to secure the affections of his 'toy-boy': indeed, Hermes is familiarly addressed as the bringer of good fortune by the poet-lover who has won the attention of his love interest by the risky ploy of telling him their incipient affair would never work out and then dismissing him. He is meticulous in noting the date on which he first told the youth the relationship was over: it was 20 June; but as Stephen Lombardo translates thereafter:

... on the – what was it – 10th of July

the ox came to the plow all by itself,

and I said, 'That's my boy, Hermes, that's my boy, and never you mind

about the twenty-day late charge.'¹²

As this tongue-in-cheek epigram suggests, the raunchier side of Hermes is most at home in a comedic setting, and so it is not surprising to find Hermes as both joker and butt of jokes in Attic comedy. It is in this genre and those of the satyr-play where Hermes' expressed desire for meat in the *Hymn* is converted into the near insatiable appetite of the trickster. Among the fragments of the lesser lights of Greek comedy can be found a reference by the poet Strattis (fr. 23, Storey vol. 3) to a 'Hermes-drink' which is drunk from either a mug (or a jug!) mixed in equal parts with water (*Athenaios* 473a). The proportions here contrast with the typical ratio of three parts water to one part wine, which could indicate a joke at Hermes' desire for a 'quicker picker-upper'. Similarly, a fragment from a play by Teleclides has a character directing 'Lord Hermes' to scarf down the sacrificial offerings (fr. 35, Storey vol. 3). The same appeal to Hermes' appetitive nature is found in several places in Aristophanes' extant plays, both those in which Hermes is a character and those wherein he is merely referred to or invoked.¹³

As noted previously, in Aristophanes' comedy, *Peace*, Trygaeus is able to gain Hermes' cooperation in the mission to rescue the goddess Peace, only by appeal to his stomach – and his ego; in *Wealth* it is Hermes' empty belly that drives him to negotiate his way into the new world order under the leadership of the god, Wealth. There is surely also an ironic kind of humour informing the choice of the menial task given the god once he has been granted admission: Kairon sets this ravenous god's hand to washing the offal from the sacrificial victim!

p.98

Outside of comedy proper, Hungry Hermes appears in a twelve-line epigram (9.316) with a humorous bent, wherein a certain Leonidas of Tarentum represents a talking boundary stone with the image of Hermes on one side and Herakles on the other. The speaking side, not surprisingly, is Hermes and he makes a joke about Herakles' proverbial appetite, which is depriving him of his own requisite honours when an offering is made to both of them together. Hermes therefore requests that offerings be specifically granted to each separately so that he might get what is rightfully his.

Also used in comedy to great effect is Hermes' status in relation to Zeus. As the chief god's personal assistant, comedy makes Hermes no more than a glorified and overworked servant. That is his role when we meet him in *Peace*, left behind by the rest of the pantheon to stand guard over the measly household implements that remain on Olympus. As Cassio (1981: 18) observes, '[i]n the course of the fifth century bc Hermes' status among the Olympians becomes lower, and his role as servant is often stressed'.¹⁴

In addition to comedy and tragedy, the fifth-century Athenians enjoyed a third dramatic genre known as satyr-plays. These were humorous renderings of tragic themes presented with a chorus of men dressed as satyrs, those half-goat, half-man mythical attendants of the god Dionysos. Bakola (2005) has noted twelve points of strong similarities between Old Comedy and this third genre, including the use each makes of 'trickery and fraud' (54), the 'motif of disguise and transformation,' a 'god's amorous adventure with a mortal woman' and the 'theme of a contest' (57) – all also closely associated with Hermes.¹⁵

It is in the context of the contests held for Hermes that the events reported in an epigram by Nicarchos (11.1) took place. Apparently there was an accident involving a certain Aphrodisios at the Hermaia at which some wine was spilt. It is not wholly clear whether the subsequent mourning of which the poem speaks is caused by the accidental death of Aphrodisios or merely by the loss of six *choes* of wine; perhaps, given the reference to the wine-fuelled brawl that brought death to the Centaurs, it is Aphrodisios' stumble that causes a 'barney' which eventually ended in his own or some others' death. Humour touched with a hint of sadness or of the tragic.

TRICKSTER TRICKED

One of the features of trickster tales which is almost universal sees the trickster become the victim of his own trick. For Hermes such an ending to his escapades is non-existent (unless we see Hermes' receipt of the Bee Maiden oracle as an embarrassing outcome). In fact, the majority of tales in which a trick of Hermes' 'backfires' are primarily late and found among the *Fables* attributed to Aesop, and these have more to do with Hermes' supposed acquisitiveness than with his typical *modus operandi*. For instance, in one fable (Aesop *Fables* 476) a certain traveller swore to give Hermes half of anything he found while making his journey. Along the way he comes across a bag containing almonds and dates and, after eating them all, he placed the almond shells and date pits back in the bag and set it on an altar, telling Hermes that he had saved the outsides and

In another (*Fables* 475) Hermes is the one who sets out to put the mantic skills of the seer Tiresias to the test. First, he steals the seer's cattle and then appears to him as a mortal. After being received hospitably as a guest, he informs Tiresias of the theft and then accompanies him to the city limits at the seer's request so that he can tell the blind seer what he observes the birds doing. First he reports an eagle flying left to right, which the seer says does not concern the matter at hand. Then he reports seeing a certain bird sitting in tree looking up then looking down. In response to this information, the seer says that the bird is swearing an oath to the effect that he will get his cattle back *if his guest is willing*. Hermes got his answer: his disguise could conceal neither his identity nor the fact that he was the thief!¹⁶

Amusingly, it is worth noting that according to Philostratos (*Life of Apollonios of Tyana* 5.15.29–33), it was Hermes who gave Aesop the gift of fable-writing in the first place: like Epimetheus in Protagoras' story of the progress of humankind (Plato, *Protagoras* 320d–321c), who had given out everything, forgetting about humans, Hermes too had given the best of what he had to offer to those who had given him the best gifts, but forgotten about Aesop because his gift was so lowly. The only thing remaining was what Philostratos calls “fable-making” being the art of “mythology”, with which Aesop seemingly was able to get the last laugh on Hermes.

GAMER AND PLAYER

One of the earliest ‘games’ that a parent will play with their child is ‘peek-a-boo’, a game which typically involves hiding one's own or the baby's face behind a piece of cloth, in effect making one's face ‘disappear’ and then suddenly making it appear again. The sudden revelation of what seemed to have disappeared typically evokes laughter from the child and brings a smile to the adult's face as well. Hermes may be deadly serious when he tells his mother that if his father does not properly acknowledge and honour him, as he has done Apollo, he will become the ‘Leader of Thieves’; however, even in the process of leading the cows from Pieria to the cave by the Alpheios, Hermes does so in a teasing manner, seemingly toying with (and testing) his brother's ‘sign-reading’ skills. When he finally encounters his brother, he deliberately sends him cues that he is just ‘playing’ with him, although his brother is initially rather slow to pick up

on them. He 'winks', belches (or 'farts') and sneezes, all in an attempt to get his brother to 'play along.' Eventually Apollo does, by allowing Hermes to lead him to Olympus for a 'mock trial' before his father. Here too Hermes 'winks' to let his father know that it is all a game – unless he fails to honour him appropriately. When Zeus laughs, as Apollo did earlier, indicating a willingness to play along, they allow Hermes to demonstrate the full range of his abilities. His game ends when he is awarded the honours bestowed on him not by Apollo, but by his father.¹⁷

p.100

In other versions of the cattle theft, Hermes is an even lighter-fingered thief than in the *Hymn*. In Alkaios' version, there seems to be an older but no less guileful game-player, who snatches both the quiver and bow away from Apollo without his older brother even realising they are missing. In Philostratos' description of a painting depicting the events of Hermes' first days of life (*Imagines* 1.26), he locates Hermes' quick-fingered nabbing of his brother's bow and arrows in the context of an argument over the theft of the cattle which is taking place inside Maia's cave. Just like Hermes' unexpected bodily noises in the *Hymn*, this expertly executed removal of personal property causes Apollo to chuckle and give himself leave to be amused. Hermes' trickiness in this instance, as in the *Hymn*, causes a knowing sort of laughter from those who have been victims of the god's cleverness. They know when they have been 'out-played'.

But Hermes, according to Aesop, can also make a joke at this own expense. In *Fables* 563, a sculptor, who had carved a beautiful statue of Hermes from white marble, was torn between to which of two men he should sell the statue: one wanted it to mark his son's tomb, the other to set it up as a gift to the god. Hermes appeared to him in a dream standing by the Gate of Dreams, saying, 'Well then, it seems I hang in the balance: whether you will make me a god or a corpse!'

It could be argued that Hermes' 'theft' of Apollo's fifty cows is itself a playful prank to gain the attention of his father. By displaying what he is able to do without anyone noticing, and thus what he is able to be if not included among the Olympians, Hermes simultaneously shows his father how useful he can be when his skills are placed into Zeus' divine service and how disruptive he will be if his father decides not to work within the order he has already established. In point of fact, all the gods use their unique talents to serve the will of Zeus – all are, in effect, his 'servants'; however, Zeus gives them leave to oversee their own particular areas of specialisation rather than dictating each of their tasks individually. For their worshippers, this means it is highly probable that the gods'

individual honours and stories differed from one town and region to another and in numerous local pantheons Hermes retained his attributes as a 'trickster' god, despite the suppression of his 'trickster-like' behaviour in Homer and Hesiod. Thus, Sparta seems to have had a similar test of thieving as part of their initiation to manhood rites in which Hermes served as model. It is possible that there were more such localised stealing festivals for which we have no evidence, especially relating to the development of youths into responsible adults. However, it is also most likely that at major pan-Hellenic festivals, any remaining 'trickster' associations were not highlighted if they were in evidence at all.

The *Hymn* provides us with information as to why this should be the case: when Hermes is explaining to his mother why he has been mischievous, having already demonstrated his ability to become a perpetually successful thief, he then threatens to take up the role of 'Leader of Thieves' if his father Zeus does not grant his youngest the son the *timai* he deserves (173–5). As it turns out, Zeus does grant Hermes the honours he was seeking within the Olympian pantheon, and this should suggest that Hermes' threat to become the perpetual thief has been thwarted. It would seem that Lewis Hyde's observation on tricksters is certainly correct as far as Hermes goes: 'If trickster were ever to get into power, he would stop being trickster' (1999: 13).¹⁸

p.101

OVERVIEW

In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, there are several aspects of the young god's behaviour which share affinities with the figure of the trickster found in cultures spread across the world, not least of which is the stealth displayed in the theft of fifty of his brother's cows and the cleverness involved in inventing things which will be of benefit to society. Like the trickster in other cultures, while Hermes can occasionally be crude and do things which raise a laugh, even at his own expense, he needs to be taken seriously: culture is indebted to him for his creativity and for his inadvertent highlighting of social ills in need of attention. All of this makes Hermes an excellent subject for comedic forms of expression, from the humour-filled plays of fifth-century comedy to those of fourth-century Middle Comedy; from epigrams and fables to artistic depictions of the god which shade into the laughably grotesque. Verbal and visual deceiver, light-fingered thief, creative genius: Hermes is the god who can transgress any boundary with impunity, as well as the one who will permit others to cross them, even when doing so violates a law. Thus, like tricksters in

other societies' sacred tales, Hermes stands as the god who facilitates change, innovation and occasionally upheaval, but unlike the trickster, he will not remain a continual transgressor against the powers that be.

NOTES

- 1 On the prestige value of cattle in Homeric times, see Athanassakis (1992); on their value generally, see McInverney (2010).
 - 2 This subtitle is borrowed from the first book of the twentieth century to be written in English devoted solely to the study of Hermes: Brown's *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth* (1969 [1947]).
 - 3 There is also a debate over whether the Prometheus plays were actually by Aeschylus and whether they included two or three tragedies. For more on this play, see Dougherty (2006: 65–75); Podlecki (2005); Conacher (1980).
 - 4 Mairs (2011) has an insightful discussion of the slippage between translator and traitor; for a case of suspicion gone too far, see Sealey (1976).
 - 5 Usener (1904: 264) discusses Hermes and these other gods as 'whisperers.' See also Brown (1969: 14–16) on the perceived magic of whispered words. Plutarch, *Advice to the Bride and Groom* (138cd) discusses the persuasive and erotic benefits of the whisper in love-making.
 - 6 Other references to the effects of Hermes' wand on vision occur at Homer, *Iliad* (24, 333–4, 443–6); *Odyssey* (5.47–8, 7.136–8, 24.1–4); Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (1.668–75, 713–14, 2.734–6, 11.303–9a). Carastro (2007: 71–2) refers to the wand as 'properly an instrument of Hermes' ruse and deceit.'
 - 7 For Hermes as the Leader of Dreams see Fourth *Homeric Hymn* (14); Aesop, *Fables* (563).
 - 8 Petrovic (2010: 211) suggests that the Hermes of Kallimachos' *Seventh Iambos*, which provides an aetiology for the cult of Hermes *Perpheraios* at Ainos, has the ability to 'utter incantations' which prevent his effigy from being harmed. For Hermes in the Greek magical papyri, see Betz (1986). For Herms and images of Hermes as talismanic, see Faraone (1992).
 - 9 On the lead curse tablets, see Faraone (1985: 150–4); Curbera and Jordon (1998); on Hermes, oaths and curses, see Brown (1969: 9, n.12); Kahn (1978: 81–117); Burkert (1985: 250–4); in relation to merchants, Rauh (1993: 151–89). Entraglo (1970) discusses word-magic in healing; Walsh (1984) considers the changing conception of the magic of words in the classical period.
- p.102
- 10 On the magical qualities of guardian statues, see Faraone (1992); Steiner (2001). On ancient magic generally, see Graf (1999); Collins (2008).
 - 11 For Hermes and Aphrodite at Argos, see Marchetti (1993); at Kato Syme, see Lebessi (1976); Lebessi and Muhly (1987, 1990). For images of Hermes and Aphrodite together, see *LIMC* 2.2, 1984 (A. Delivarrios, ed.), 127–8.
 - 12 Also see A.W. Mair's collection of Kallimachos' *Hymns and Epigrams*, where this one appears as *Epigram* 46, pp. 260–1.
 - 13 Bowie (1993) provides a most insightful study of the religious aspects of Hermes in

Aristophanes' plays.

- 14 Additionally, in this play, humans are attempting to retrieve Peace from an underground cavern where she has been confined, so it is to be expected that the god who can descend and ascend from below almost at will would be the one whose assistance was sought in the raising of Peace. See Zanker (1965: 81ff.); Raingeard (1935: 509–10); Cassio (1981: 17).
- 15 For a focused study on satyr-play, see Sutton (1980), and more recently, Harrison (2005). For comparative studies of comedy and satyr-play, see also Dobrov (2007); Bakola (2005). Additionally, in the fourth century, comedies based on the birth of the gods became quite popular with plays staging Hermes' exploits based on the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* being produced; see Shaw (2010); Nesselrath (1995).
- 16 For tricksters caught by their own trick, see Canonici (1994).
- 17 Radin (1956: x) claims, 'Laughter, humour and irony permeate everything Trickster does'; Martin (2010: 30) calls the *Hymn* a 'comic masterpiece': for recent discussions of Hermes, laughter and the *Hymn*, with earlier references, see Bungard (2011); Vergado (2011); Versnel (2011: esp. 309–77); Richardson (2010: 19–20; 2007, 86–8); Hynes and Doty (1993: passim). Kidron (2006) offers a particularly detailed study of the mechanisms of laughter and the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*.
- 18 Ricketts (1966: 343–4) goes so far as to say that 'trickster is not, properly, the object of worship. He is not a spirit or a god, but a myth-being . . . / Only exceptionally and aberrantly is the trickster held to be a spirit or a god. In each instance it can be shown that this feature is a secondary development'. Ricketts is contradicted later by Babcock-Abrahams (1975: 164) who claims that the trickster is a 'sacred being' which does not necessarily mean that he is a god.



6

TRANSCENDENCE

Being born of a long-lived nymph and the chief god of the divine family did not guarantee that Hermes would himself be recognised as a god. Other offspring of such unions typically retained the mortality of their mothers: of Zeus' more than fifty human sons, only one achieved divine status, but he had to die first to do so, and that was Herakles, born of the mortal Alkmene. That Hermes is indeed a god is revealed when Apollo arrives at the cave to find the cupboards full of ambrosia and nektor, the food of the gods (in addition to other material signs of prosperity stored within): however, from Hermes' perspective, these indicators of divine standing do not provide sufficient acknowledgement of his godhood. Hermes wants his divine status to be publicly recognised by his father. But he also seems to understand intuitively that in planning to create a god like himself, Zeus needs to see evidence that his plans are being fulfilled: as the *Hymn* states (10–12), 'But when the intentions of Great Zeus were fulfilled [that is, the impregnating of Maia and her coming to term] . . . he [Hermes] came into the light, *having been destined* for glorious works.' The nature of those 'glorious works' is yet to be determined.

Zeus clearly had high expectation of this child; however, the *Hymn's* phrasing suggests that Zeus will adopt a wait-and-see attitude, looking for proof that this newly born being has what it takes to achieve his destiny. As Hermes see it, the best approach seems to be that of demonstrating what a nuisance he will be if Zeus delays or refuses to honour him. So, his first engagements with the world are those of a trickster: his first 'glorious work' is that of misleading and then killing an innocent tortoise. This is followed by the theft of part of Apollo's divine herd and the brutal killing of two of the cows as though they were pre-battle sacrificial victims. In order to conceal his identity, Hermes also weaves together myrtle and tamarisk to create a form of footwear that makes it appear as though

something of monstrous size has absconded with the cows. In this, the praise-poet seems to be playing with the theogonic *topos* of the monster-challenger that attempts to overthrow the current ruling order in heaven. These figures are typically generated and/or supported by the mother/wife in favour of her own natal family's return to power.¹

Given that Maia is the daughter of Atlas, the Titan brother of Prometheus, and thus the latter's niece, the potential for the creation of another rebel is very real. Indeed, the antics undertaken in his first hours of life up to and including the slaughter of the two cows indicate that Hermes has the skills to be his uncle Prometheus' replacement – another trickster figure. But what Hermes does next shows Zeus that his young son does not want to undermine his father's authority, for in distributing the meat of the cows to the gods with each of the twelve portions awarded its own *geras* ('portion of honour'), Hermes shows Zeus his willingness to work with him. Thus, although Hermes has demonstrated the ability to remain an eternal thief, as Heiden (2010: 418) observes, '[t]hieves are outsiders; Hermes wants to belong . . . he wants his father to treat him as the son he is . . . he wants to join the community of Olympians'.²

p.104

Hermes also seems to know that, prior to his birth, the divisions in the cosmos were clearly defined and the honours of each of Zeus' siblings and children clearly apportioned, making a well-ordered but static universe. Each god functioned in his or her own area independently of the others, with the possibility for growth and change limited at best. Additionally, although all the gods were at liberty to remain in the mortal realm for as long as they wished, the Olympians were denied access to Hades' realm. If any god wished to chat to the Lord of the underworld, they would have to meet together in the land of men – something neither Hades nor the other gods were particularly keen to do (or so it would seem by the lack of stories about such encounters) – unless Hades came to them on Olympos (something he was equally loath to do). Beyond even this, whatever connection had existed between gods and mortals prior to Prometheus' attempt to out-wit Zeus, it had been severely damaged in the aftermath, leaving humans continuously reminded of their alienation from the gods every time they prepared a meal from a ritually slaughtered animal (Hesiod, *Theogony* 553–7).³

Hermes has to demonstrate his usefulness to his father in mending the rift caused by his maternal uncle between the high gods and mortals, and he must do so by working within the order as it currently stands: but doing so does not demand that he forgo his trickster abilities. Rather, he must

make it evident that his potentially disruptive innate abilities can be directed towards those 'glorious works' that he was destined to achieve within his father's ordered cosmos. This is precisely what Zeus needs to see before granting Hermes the recognition and honours his new son so desires.

Should Hermes prove to be the versatile but loyal son Zeus needs to interface with humans, this will allow Zeus to keep the mortal realm at arm's length while still affecting things 'down there' via his surrogate. For this task there is no other god better positioned than Hermes, for as Homer reveals, there was no other god who more enjoys the company of men than does this youngest son of Zeus (*Iliad* 24.334–5). But beyond his ability to restore connections between gods and men, Hermes is an innovator and inventor who will bring orderly change under Zeus' headship; as Vergados (2011: 101) observed, 'Hermes is precedent-setting: first lyre, first iambic, first Theogony; first fire-sticks, first "equal feast", first gift, first barter, first negotiation, first arbitration of dispute settlement, first pipes'. Thus, once Zeus has the measure of Hermes, he permits Apollo to bestow upon him the staff of gold which not only represents Hermes' position as chief executor of Zeus' order among mortals but also serves to confirm him as Zeus' divine Herald. It is also significant that in possessing this symbol of authority Hermes will be held 'scatheless' as he enacts the distributive will of Zeus among mortals (*Hymn to Hermes* 528–32).⁴

p.105

In this regard, it is not surprising to find Hermes as one of the gods setting matters to right in a ritual which will permit the restoration of economic activity in the world of mortals. Larson (2016: 220–1) reports the instructions for a ritual procedure undertaken by the Pamphylians to prevent attacks by pirates, one they had received from Apollo's oracle at Klaros (*SEG* 41.1411). In it they are directed to 'set up an image of Ares, and perform sacrifices beside it, *while Hermes holds him in iron bonds*'. Ares is kneeling as though a suppliant and on the other side of him stands Dikê ('Justice' and 'Judgement') who passes sentence on him. Once this ritual has been performed, the Pamphylians are told that Ares will now be 'peacefully disposed' to them and thereafter they shall receive the 'much-prayed-for prosperity'. As the directions have come from Apollo, this means they originated with Zeus, and thus Hermes is authorised to restrain Ares physically without adverse effect to either himself or the people on whose behalf he restrains him. Thereafter Hermes will be free to prosper the people in accord with Zeus' will.

In a similar vein, it may well be that Hermes' innate concern with order

informs his worship under the *epikleisis Prytaneios* in several ancient cities, such as in Ioulis and Kartheia on the island of Kos (Medoni 1989). Almost ninety years ago, Toutain (1932) claimed that Hermes was the ‘social god’, meaning that he was the god most concerned with the daily casual and institutional interactions of mortals within their communities and with the gods. One of those institutions was the *Prytany*, the name of the governing body composed of civic magistrates called *prytaneis* who met in a building called the *Prytaneion* in which they conducted the city’s daily business. This often included the allocation of resources, the reception of visitors to the city and, significantly, the eating of their meals together: in other words, much of their work on behalf of the city involved them in activities with which Hermes also concerned himself: finance, friendships and feasting.

It is with good reason that Homer saw him as the ‘friendliest of gods to mortals’; but within the pantheon itself Hermes’ geniality allows him to befriend each of the Olympians and to facilitate relations between and among them. As *Homeric Hymn* 29 indicates, Hermes and Hestia were believed to work especially well together in the effective running of the household, while Hesiod placed Hermes in the company of Hekate for the care and increase of flocks (*Theogony* 444). The Fourth *Homeric Hymn* (506–8, 523–6) reports that Hermes and Apollo became fast forever-friends, while Hermes and Aphrodite, perhaps surprisingly, are frequently found together in the cult of civic magistrates. Even Hermes and Ares are happy dancing together while Apollo plays the kithara and the Muses sing in the Great Hall on Olympus (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 200–2) and work cooperatively to assist Orestes in regaining his paternity (Sophokles’ *Electra* 1396–7) by leading the avengers into the palace. But beyond the relationships Hermes forges for himself within the pantheon, it is the connections he facilitates among the other gods that convert Zeus’ static order into the dynamic one in which he plays a crucial role.⁵

ZEUS’ HERMA

Given Hermes’ trickster-like qualities, it may seem odd to claim that he is the main supporter of Zeus’ rule in the pantheon; however, when all of the stories involving Hermes are considered, there are very few instances in which the god acts from his own motives and with his own agenda. Almost every incident discussed in the preceding chapters (with the exclusion of Hermes’ fathering of children) is one in which Zeus’ youngest son is acting on behalf of his father. This is in keeping with Hermes’ expressed concern at the beginning of the *Hymn*: Hermes wants his father to uphold the order he has already put in place, and that includes the correct distribution of honours both within and outside of his own family.

Thus, as Versnel (2011: 320, n.35) observed, 'only with Hermes' birth is the configuration of the divine cosmos complete.'

p.106

His desire to work within rather than against Zeus' order is reported in an admittedly late version of a tale concerning the monstrous Typhoeus, in which the children of Zeus are already born when their father overthrows this determined opponent – in Hesiod's *Theogony*, the overthrow of the Titans and Typhoeus happens before Zeus has fathered any children, so it is just Zeus and his siblings who are ruling the cosmos (Evelyn-White 1924: xxi). But according to Nikandros' account (reported in Antoninus Liberalis *Metamorphoses* 28), when the fire-breathing Typhoeus wrested the sickle away from Zeus and rendered him immobile by cutting out the sinews from his hands and feet, Hermes, in company with Aigipan, came to his father's rescue. After stealthily stealing the sinews back from Typhoeus, Hermes returned them to Zeus so that he was able to take up the battle again and defeat the last of his enemies.

That same loyalty to his father is shown in several ways in the *Iliad*. Take, for instance, the incident involving the battle of the gods in *Iliad* 21: here, Hermes demurs from engaging Leto in battle, despite being called an astute and chivalrous warrior, who is 'strong' (*kratos*, 20.72), self-controlled and clearly a member of a group of fighters (20.33–5), because he is clearly motivated by his respect for this father's potential displeasure. Leto was once loved by Zeus and as Hermes notes, 'it is a hard thing to come to blows with the brides of Zeus' (21.498–9). This is expressive of the same sort of respect that Apollo shows for his father in attempting to avoid a direct confrontation with his uncle, Poseidon (21.468–9). In this age-ranked and hierarchically ordered society Hermes demonstrates the respect for his elders that is expected of one who is a junior member of the group. Similarly, Hermes' non-intervention in the protection of those mortals whom he loves on either side of the war serves as another instance of his relationship to the divine order and authority of Zeus. The gods who do intervene to save a favoured mortal in the *Iliad* are often shown to be at odds with Zeus elsewhere in the story. But this is never the case with Hermes.⁶

When he comes to the rescue of Ares and releases him from the 'brazen jar' in which he had been trapped for thirteen months and nearly on the point of death (*Iliad* 5.388–90), Hermes is again shown intervening in the interests of Zeus' cosmic order. His stealth certainly makes him the most likely of the gods to succeed in gaining Ares' freedom; however, Hermes' later refusal to rescue the corpse of Hektor from Achilles at the request of

some of the Olympians suggests that in both instances his choice is governed by concern with his father's order. Zeus himself (diplomatically) tells Thetis that Hermes would be unable to retrieve Hektor's body from Achilles (24.71-3), and Zeus clearly knows why: it is the same respect for his father's order that informed his declining to do battle with Leto which also informs his refusal to act on his relatives' request. Homer reveals that not all of the gods are in favour of depriving Achilles of Hektor's corpse (*Iliad* 24.25-7), so rather than escalate the hostilities within the Olympian household by acting on the urgings of only some of the gods, Hermes remains unmoved until he learns the mind of his father on this matter. When Hermes does eventually participate in the recovery of Hektor's corpse it is in accordance with Zeus' request that he serve as Priam's escort and night-guide across the plain of battle to Achilles' compound (*Iliad* 24.153-5, 334-8).⁷

p.107

When his interventions are viewed from a different perspective, it becomes apparent that each of Hermes' actions is productive of a positive resolution to a conflict which restores order and re-establishes a hierarchy that had been disrupted: Ares is restored to his place within the pantheon, while both Priam and Achilles receive the honour due to each of them. Hektor, too, in a sense, is released from a form of bondage to receive the honours (here, funerary) that are due him. At the same time, both actions result in increase; in the first case, Ares' strength and health, and in the second, Achilles' coffers. Earlier in the *Iliad* (2.100-8) Hermes was entrusted with the bestowal of order and authority from Zeus to a line of mortal kings when he was asked to deliver the divinely wrought sceptre of kingship to the line's founding father, Pelops. His participation in this transference of the symbol of earthly authority positions him as a god intimately concerned with such matters from both the human and divine perspective.

If these Iliadic events were to be catalogued in terms of the *timai* to which they explicitly or implicitly refer, they could be organised in the following manner. The first reference to Hermes in the *Iliad* (2.100-8) is suggestive of his role as mediator and go-between, a role which may also inform the presentation of Hermes as a god of diplomatic speech as seen in *Iliad* (21 and 24). Through his involvement, the will of Zeus is enacted among mortals in the establishment of human hierarchies and, by extrapolation from his diplomatic services within the Olympian pantheon, the security of those hierarchies is preserved in both realms. The next mention of the god in *Iliad* (5) credits him with saving Ares, and shows him to be functioning as a god who restores order, here to the

Olympian pantheon by the release of the war god from his prison. This same aspect of his *timai* is further accentuated in *Iliad* (24) when he assists in the return of Hektor's corpse to its rightful owners.

Also highlighted in book 24 is his prerogative as the guide and protector of those who travel, especially those who travel for the purpose of exchanging goods. Two other references in *Iliad* (14 and 16) play upon Hermes' distinction as the god who bestows wealth and may, through the term *polymêlos* ('rich is sheep'), refer to his standing as a god of pastoralists and possibly even to an association with fecundity. So we see from Hermes' involvement in the war at Troy that in serving the interests of Zeus, he does so in keeping with his own nature and within the bounds of the honours bestowed on him by his father as we find them in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*. And if Homer set the precedent, it is clear that Hermes' intervention is always in accordance with Zeus' will. Thus, although it is Zeus who wills it, it is Hermes who fulfils it, so that the affected mortal may say, as Hyde (1999: 121) puts it: 'If I suffer an accidental loss, that is Hermes the thief, and if there is an accidental gain, that is Hermes the luck-bringer.' In either event, he is acting in accord with his father's will. By the same reasoning, someone can shout '*koinos Hermes*' ('Hermes in common,' meaning 'shares in your luck,' as in Theophrastus *Characters* 30.7; Menander *Arbitrants* 67) when another person unexpectedly finds something of value, especially money, as it can be assumed that the find was not meant solely for that person, otherwise it would have been left in his or her path to find when no one else was nearby. So Hermes prospers those who should be prospered, saves those who should be saved and gives guidance to those who should receive guidance, all according to the established order of things, an order that is itself ordained by Zeus.⁸

p.108

ZEUS' SPOKESMAN

Hermes' own concern with the maintenance of proper order may explain his general place in the pantheon but it does not offer a rationale for this status as Zeus' official spokesperson, the Herald. To appreciate this, the Homeric narratives are again informative. Particularly in the *Iliad*, Heralds occupy a position of authority which is derived from their relationship to the king. Most frequently a Herald is shown acting on behalf or in the interests of the man to whom he is attached. He is also shown to be the figure who, in this epic, takes responsibility for ensuring that the sacrificial lamb and other ritual paraphernalia are ready-to-hand

for the king when he is about to swear his treaty-oath on the plains of Troy (*Iliad* 3.116–20, 368–70). In other religious rituals involving sacrifice, the *heirokêryx* ('sacred Herald') is frequently found to be the figure who not only performs the sacrificial slaughter but also officiates at the ceremony; however, in this particular instance in the *Iliad*, the king must perform the actual slaughter himself. It is also the Herald's responsibility to bring an assembly to order, just as he brings order to the communal meal, calling the diners to prepare themselves for the feast (*Odyssey* 17.170–7). He is the man who directs the other celebrants in their duties as well as the one who oversees the distribution of the properly prepared meat.⁹

In light of this, it is clear why the first thing Zeus says when he sees his newly born son standing before him is that he has the 'nature/stature (*phûên*) of a Herald' (*Hymn to Hermes* 4.331). In reinventing the sacrifice so that it involves a proportional distribution of meat each with its own portion of honour, Hermes demonstrates his innate abilities as a Herald, a concern for order and orderly distribution. Clearly as divine Herald, Hermes is in the direct service of his father and speaks in his voice when delivering his official directives to fellow gods or mortals. In overseeing the mortal and divine herds, and the assemblages of mortal animals raised and hunted by mortals, Hermes is ensuring that both gods and men have a sufficient supply of food available for convivial exchanges between and among each other and the gods. Standing guard over the altars of other gods, Hermes' gaze ensures that the correct procedures are followed and the correct proportions distributed to those involved in the celebration, both god and mortal. One suspects that the original audiences of the vases which depict Hermes looking on would immediately appreciate his presence as that of the Divine Herald as well as Messenger, ritual expert and butcher, ready to report any misdoings to his father and ready to assist in dispensing the appropriate punishment.¹⁰

p.109

Hermes' concern that he be given the appropriate honours from his father speaks to his general concern that proper order, which includes the distribution of both tangible and intangible goods, be maintained. When he suggests that Apollo should take the matter before Zeus, he appears to be introducing something new, some novel way of resolving disputes, one which does not entail the direct use of physical force; this would represent a new quality in the workings of *dikê*, which Gagarin (1973: 94) describes as 'the peaceful system for settling disputes.' The method Hermes suggests in the *Hymn* appears to be that of arbitration, and this involves the 'voluntary submission of a dispute to one particular judge by both parties' (Gagarin 1989: 21). Apollo, however, has been pursuing the route of 'self-

help' and is initially unwilling to take up Hermes' recommendation, and so it is Hermes who takes the initiative to get him moving (literary and figuratively) in the direction of Olympus.

Once there, Apollo's presentation reveals his unfamiliarity with the process. Rather than making his case in a way that will persuade his father that he has suffered an injustice for which the perpetrator must be punished and restitution made, what emerges is his concern with not knowing where his cows are hidden (Fourth *Homeric Hymn* 334–64). This then becomes the concern addressed by Zeus in his decision when he speaks forth his 'straight *dikē*' on the matter: Apollo is awarded access to the knowledge he seeks. Zeus is fully aware that, despite his clever denials, Hermes knows the cows' whereabouts and he directs him to share that knowledge with Apollo ('to be of one mind,' 4.391) without any further thoughts of injury (4.391–4). Neither Hermes nor Apollo suffers a loss of honour in this decision. Ensuring that both of his sons retain their honour, he leaves it up to the two brothers to decide between them which 'concessions' each will retain as his own, subject, of course, to final confirmation from Zeus. But in his willingness to assent readily to Zeus' decision, Hermes reveals himself to be wholly supportive of, and responsive to, the will of his father. His nature is indeed that of a *kêryx*, and a *therapôn*.¹¹

The *therapôn* or 'personal attendant' of the ruler (e.g., *Odyssey* 14.75–82, 19.530) is also a figure known to Homer, who is presented as analogous to the Herald, being permitted to perform many of the same tasks, particularly the culinary ones, typically under the Herald's control. As Odysseus observes, the *therapôn* is 'knowledgeable in the carving of meats' (*Odyssey* 16.253). It is especially suggestive, then, that within the Homeric narratives, the figure of the Herald is considered to be a particular type of *therapôn*, given that a *therapôn* is typically a man of noble birth who became the attendant of another nobleman as a result of some unfortunate circumstance (e.g., *Odyssey* 18.423–4). Unlike the aristocratic servant who had been sold into servitude as a captive, the *therapôn* continued to be viewed as a freeman who voluntarily, in respect of his obligation and as an expression of gratitude, made himself available to the man who had given him refuge. As van Wees (1992: 32) has observed, the *therapôn* was as highly ranked in the Homeric narratives as the princes themselves. Although not wholly autonomous, the *therapôn* was well respected by the household's master and given remarkable responsibilities and decision-making powers within the house. He was generally put in charge of other domestic slaves and saw to his master's needs personally (e.g., *Odyssey* 8.418, 13.647, 18.290–301).¹²

With this understanding of Hermes' relationship to Zeus, it should not be surprising that Hermes appears in so many tales on errands for his father, as these fit most comfortably within his purview as Zeus' *therapôn*; interestingly, Athena, another deity who inherited her own share of 'cunning intelligence', is frequently Hermes' companion on these missions. So it is that Zeus turns to Hermes and Athena when he wishes to see Perseus succeed in his mission to slay the Gorgons (Gantz 1996: 304–7); these gods each give him gifts appropriate to the nature of his task, and Hermes also serves as his guide. Hermes and Athena are also found working together to assist Herakles in his Labours, with Hermes again standing as his escort from one place to another. Indeed, in almost every recorded instance where Hermes is said to be leading someone somewhere, he is doing so in accord with the larger plans of Zeus. Such associations are likely to have extended to the thought-life of real Greek travellers and their understanding of the wayside Herm: each would serve as a reminder that Hermes was there as an unseen presence who would help or hinder them in their progress as they journeyed through the countryside across both well-trodden and less well-travelled tracks towards their destination in accord with the will of Zeus.¹³

At other times Hermes is called upon to take a more physically direct role in the movement of persons from one place to another. On several occasions his father asks him to serve temporarily as a sort of *Kourotrophos* (a 'Child-Rearer', literally 'Nurturer of the Young'; see Hadzisteliou-Price 1978), although technically he does not actively participate in their continuous rearing: rather, he is granted the title of 'Child-Carer' in these cases because he facilitates the child's survival: without the temporary care he provides by literally up-lifting and transporting these infants from danger into the hands of those who will lovingly care for them, their chance of survival was very slim indeed. Yet it is because Zeus wants these infants to survive that he sends Hermes: only the speediest of gods who knows how to get around and through obstacles is the ideal choice for these rescue missions.

In many instances, the child Hermes rescues is the illegitimate offspring of another god who had forced his affections on the mother, as in the case of his recovery of Apollo's child, Asklepeias, snatched from the flames of a pyre lit to punish Koronis for her infidelity to the god (Pausanias 2.26.3–10). Euripides, in his tragedy *Ion*, tells the tale of a young mortal boy born to Queen Kreousa of Athens following her rape by Apollo. It opens with Hermes as the prologue speaker explaining the backstory and his role in rescuing the baby from death by exposure at his brother's request and

bringing the newborn to his brother's Temple at Delphi to be raised by the god's prophetess as a temple servant (*Ion* 1-81). In another tale, Zeus impregnated the mortal woman Semele who was killed before giving birth.

p.111



Figure 6.1 'Hermes holding Dionysos'; marble copy of mid-fourth century BCE

Rescuing the foetus of Dionysos from the dying mother and sewing it into his own thigh, on the point of giving birth Zeus calls for Hermes and directs him to carry his newborn to the nymphs of Mount Nysa to be reared (Figure 6.1). So, in addition to Zeus, Hermes is the god relied upon by his fellow deities to rescue and courier their illegitimate children from danger to safety, so that they will be able to grow and mature into either a richly blessed mortal (such as Ion, King of Athens) or a special divinity (such as Dionysos). Despite all this salvific work in the past, there were no temples honouring Hermes *Kourotrophos*, in part because his direct engagement with mortals in this way no longer took place, given that male gods were mating with neither nymphs nor mortal females anymore.¹⁴

In addition to child-rescue missions, Zeus also sends Hermes on errands that will assist him in getting to the attractive female with whom he seeks to mate. In Lucian's *Dialogue of the Gods* (14), desiring to spend an extended period of time with Alkmene, the wife of Amphityron, Hermes is sent as Zeus' emissary to Helios with the command that the latter not shed his light for one full day (see also *Dialogue of the Gods* 7 and 11). Hermes' assistance in this area was also called upon when Zeus wanted to mate with Io, the young daughter of Inachos, who was a priestess serving in Hera's temple. This is tale of the slaying of Argos and the transformation of Io into a cow; however, a scholiast on the meaning of 'Hermes' out-crop' ('*Hermaios lophos*') at *Odyssey* (16.471) (specifically the scholiast on 16.471.10–20 Q.V.) is prompted to link the stone-mounds associated with Hermes with the Argos story. Thus he reports that in killing Argos, Hermes became the first murderer; but because he did so in the service of Zeus, when the court of gods found him guilty, they threw their stones at his feet, and thereby created the practice of building stone-mounds for Hermes. It would seem Hermes is also willing to take actions that may cause him to suffer humiliation or become the butt of jokes in the service of his father.

ZEUS' DELIGHTER

It would seem that prior to Hermes' arrival, Zeus' cosmos was a very well-ordered but rather dull and joyless place. With Hermes' advent, however, Zeus succeeded in bringing liveliness to his cosmos, with the possibility

for surprise and the laughter that surprise often carries in its wake. Hermes fairly ‘bubbles’ with a joy in living and a glee in the unexpected – everything has hidden potential: only the demands of the moment make what is hidden apparent for those with eyes to see – and these Hermes certainly has. This makes Hermes very adaptable both in Zeus’ service and in the tales told about him.

Lucian had great fun with the pregnant thigh of Zeus and Hermes and Hephaistos as midwives in his *Dialogues of the Gods* (9). He raises a laugh by having Aiakos, the gate-keeper to Hades’ underworld abode, warn Hermes against attempting any of his thievish tricks in Hades’ realm, when Hermes finds himself one dead man short on arrival (*Downward Journey* 4). When Apollo and Hephaistos get together they share complaints about the young god, with Apollo reporting to his uncle that Hermes has not only stolen Poseidon’s trident and pinched Ares’ sword out of his scabbard without the latter’s notice, but has also taken Apollo’s own bow and arrows. But that’s not all: when Aphrodite was giving Hermes a welcoming hug into the pantheon, he stole her girdle; and, while Zeus was laughing at this, the little thief made off with his sceptre and would have taken Zeus’ thunderbolt as well if it were not so hot and heavy (*Dialogues of the Gods* 7).

Despite the fact that Hermes is the god who plays a significant role in seeing to it that the world goes round according to his father’s will, he has to have his fingers in so many proverbial pies that he easily can become the butt of jokes. As in previous instances, Aesop takes great liberties with Hermes in his fables, some based on the very busyness of the god. It seems Hermes is particularly open to sarcastic humour in his capacity as ‘Giver of Good Things’ and ‘Luck-Bringer’; in other words, in the area of his oversight of exchange relationships. For instance, when Hermes was curious as to the honour in which he was held by mortals, he took on the appearance of a man and entered a sculptor’s shop. First he inquired as to the price of a statue of Zeus, and was told one drachma. At this he laughed, asking further as to the price of Hera; more than the other, he was told. Then Hermes noticed a statue of himself and thinking himself of great importance to mortals, asked what value was placed on it, and he was told that if he bought the other two, the sculptor would throw in the Hermes for free (Fable 562)! In another such fable, a man wanted to sell his Hermes statue, but finding no takers, he began to proclaim it as a very enriching image to own. When queried as to why he is not keeping it for himself, he answers that he seeks more immediate satisfaction than the god is willing to give (Fable 561).

Another sort of fable shows Hermes defending Zeus' order and offers a moral of the sort more in keeping with many 'lesson' fables associated with Aesop's name. In this one (Fable 171), a man standing on the shore, having witnessed the drowning of a ship's crew and passengers, rails against the injustice of Destiny, which allows so many lives to perish because one criminal was aboard the ship. As he was musing thus, he noticed he was standing near an ant mound and a mass of ants had surrounded him. When one of them climbed his leg and bit him, he immediately stomped on them, killing them all. Immediately thereafter Hermes appeared and hit the man with his wand, asking whether he was in any position to judge the workings of Destiny given that he had just wiped out an entire colony of ants for the sake of one.

Hermes is able to combine his associations with play, destined outcomes and knucklebones (*astragali*) through the uses to which they are put. For children the knucklebones of sheep, typically after some modification, were used in a way similar to that of dice today. Each of the bones' surfaces were engraved with numerals or signs, so that the side facing upward after being thrown could be 'counted.' Hermes was believed to be the god who presided over games of 'chance' such as this, as indicated in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* when he is called the 'Leader (or Bringer) of *Tūchē*' ('Luck', 'Chance'). But in addition to their use as playthings, *astragali* were also used in divinatory rituals not only in ancient Greece but throughout the Mediterranean basin. Here 'chance' is understood as revelatory of Zeus' will, with Hermes' toys serving as messenger in his stead. Perhaps not surprisingly, *astragali* have also been found in contexts associated with funerals; perhaps here they represent a desire that the deceased fare well (i.e., have 'good luck') in the afterlife or are meant as an offering to Hermes as the guide of souls. Whatever their meaning in each find context, archaeologists have unearthed knucklebones with Hermes' name incised even as far afield as Sha'ar-Ha'amkin, a Hellenistic-Roman outpost in the territory of ancient Israel.¹⁵

Hermes' contribution to the preservation and maintenance of Zeus' order proved itself to be fertile ground for another of Aesop's *Fables* (524). Zeus sets Hermes the task of inscribing each of the transgressions made by each human as they occur on pieces of broken pots and then placing them in a chest next to Zeus' throne. Unfortunately, because the violations were so numerous, Hermes was unable to maintain them in order of occurrence and the newest shards became jumbled up with the older ones whenever Zeus reached into the chest. This meant that recent crimes were being punished ahead of older ones, much to the chagrin of mortals. Aesop is clearly offering a humorous explanation for why some crimes seem to go unpunished, and in this explanation the reason is twofold: mortals commit too many offences, so many in fact that Hermes

cannot maintain Zeus' order in this area. Centuries later Lucian can still raise a laugh at Hermes' expense on this very point: in his *Dialogues of the Gods* (4) Hermes grumbles to Maia about how busy he is because he has been given so many things to do.

ZEUS' NETWORKER

Hermes is certainly the god most involved in the affairs of men: enriching some and depriving others, all in accordance with Zeus' will. It seems most appropriate, then, that as the god who has the greatest interactions with mortals – even though he is typically invisible during the encounters – he would be the one who engages with them at the moment of their departure from this life. In a position that is uniquely his, Hermes is made quite literally the 'Guide of Souls' (*Psychopompos*: *Psycho* = 'spirit', 'soul' + *pompos* = 'leader'); that is, the divinity who escorts the souls of humans from the world of light to their new home in the House of Hades (Figure 6.2). References to Hermes in this role are second only to those citing his position as official Herald and Messenger of Zeus.



Figure 6.2 Depicting the psyche: author's drawing of detail from Attic white-ground lekythos attributed to the Achilles painter, c. 440 BCE

The very first instance in which Hermes is seen performing as *Psychopompos* occurs at the beginning of *Odyssey* (24), when he is described as leading the souls of Penelope's suitors, slain by the returning Odysseus, to the underworld. Given that both Thebes and Tanagra laid claim to being the birthplace of Hermes, it is significant that the poet chooses to name the god Kyllenian Hermes when he is introduced in this role in the first line of this book (24: 1–2, 5):

p.115

So Kyllenian Hermes was summoning forth the souls

Of the suitors; and he had in his hand the wand . . .

And with it he set them in motion, leading them

Clearly, in his mind, the Hermes from Arcadia was the one whom Zeus appointed to this sombre but significant role. Shortly thereafter we are told it was as the suitor's souls were complaining about their lot that '*diaktoros Argeiphontes* ["the Minister Radiantly Shining One" – or "Dog-Slayer"] came near leading their souls down' (24.99–100).¹⁶

One might expect Hermes to make regular appearances in this capacity in the *Iliad*, given the number of souls who depart from life in the midst of the war; however, such is not the case, as Hermes' status as *Psychopompos* is never mentioned directly in this epic. Nevertheless, and perhaps coincidentally, also in *Iliad* 24, the circumstances of the night passage, the age of Priam, the quest for a corpse and several other features of the leading of Priam to Achilles' compound have suggested to some that this sequence has affinities with the descent of the soul to the underworld guided by Hermes as *Psychopompos*. Similarities between the features of *Iliad* 24 and Hermes' journey with the cows and the location in which they were stored have also been identified with descent narratives, which might suggest that this too was an ability Zeus recognised in his son before appointing him to the position of *Psychopompos* in his cosmos. Plutarch (*Greek Questions* 24) is aware of an Argive rite in which Hermes received cult in his capacity as 'Leader of Souls': he reports that thirty days after, relatives and close friends of the deceased offer sacrifice to Hermes because he is the 'receiver of souls'.¹⁷

Hermes' ability to communicate with and direct the souls of the dead is acknowledged in some of the extant plays and fragments of Athenian tragedy, particularly those of Aischylos. In his *Persians* (628–30), Hermes is the one from whom the chorus request aid in the sending up of Darios' ghost. Similarly, in a fragment of the play *Psychagogoi* ('Soul [or Ghost]-

Raisers,' Henderson, vol. 3, v.8) by the same poet, Hermes *Chthonios* is again acknowledged by the chorus as the one who escorts the deceased. Electra in Aischylos' *Choephoroi* (123) invokes Hermes by the same title as she stands beside her father's tomb, acknowledging him as 'the great herald of those above and below' when she asks the god to come to her aid. He is noted as 'guide of souls' in Sophokles' *Ajax* (*Aias*, 831–4) and, as noted previously, in Sophokles' *Elektra*, Hermes leads Ares and his human agents into the Mycenaean palace, which has been styled 'a house of death' in order to commit the murder of Aigisthos and Klytemnestra. The audience would certainly have understood that Hermes the Guide would be well placed to become Hermes *Psychopompos* in a matter of moments. Even as late as the first century BCE Hermes is still recognised as *Psychopompos* in inscriptions from as far afield as Patara, Crete and Eretria.

Hermes' ability to negotiate and cooperate with the Lord of the underworld, in addition to his unique privilege as the only Olympian permitted to enter and leave Hades' realm at will, certainly contributes to his being granted the *epikleises*, *Chthonios* ('Underworld') Hermes. This is the title by which he is often addressed in Greek tragedy and it also appears as his title in an Orphic Hymn in his honour (*Hymn 57 to Hermes Chthonios*). The Orphic Hermes, however, is rather a different creature. In this honorific poem he is described as a divine child, not of Zeus, but of Dionysos and Aphrodite, who lives below, next to one of the underworld's rivers, having received his office as *Psychopompos* from Persephone rather than Celestial Zeus. Why these changes have been wrought to the more traditional view of Hermes presented in the majority of other sources is not stated, but it seems fair to surmise that it came to be seen as a significant point of difference for those who were attracted to the teaching of Orphism. A periphrastic invocation of Hermes *Chthonios* as 'the grandson of great Pleione' (aka, Maia) can still be found in the epic *Argonautica* by the Latin poet of the first century CE, Valerius Flaccus (1.737–8), although it is in the context of a necromancy. There is some evidence to suggest that necromancies were familiar to some of the fifth-century BCE Athenians, but these 'ghost-raising' seem to grow in popularity as the centuries pass. What remains unclear is whether Hermes was regularly invoked to assist in the raising of ghosts in actual necromancies or this involvement remained merely a literary trope.¹⁸

Additionally, there seem to be instances where Hermes is permitted to hold the scale in which the fate of human lives is held in balance (Figure 6.3).



Figure 6.3 'Hermes weighing the souls', Nikon painter, early fifth century BCE

Louvre / Hervé Lewandowski © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

p.117

In the *Iliad* (22.208–13) Homer attributes this task to Zeus himself, describing how he holds the fates of Achilles and Hektor to see which one will sink: whichever does so indicates the one whose death is imminent. In art, these 'fates' are represented as barely visible miniature human forms, as the soul and the fate of an individual are one and the same. In neither case does it seem that Zeus or Hermes determines the fate of the lives in the scales. In the example taken from Homer, Zeus has a personal interest in seeing which one's time has come, but he does not determine that time for him. The same is likely true for Hermes: he is looking to see whose soul will be the next to require his service as *Psychopompos* so as to be prepared to act. It may also be that like Zeus, Hermes was seen to be personally interested in the fate of at least one of the souls being weighed. In any event, his status as *Psychopompos* is implied in the image.

Just as Hermes can lead souls down to Hades' realm, so too can he be tasked with leading them up again as, for instance, in the case of the

raising of Orpheus' wife, Eurydikê; however, he is also involved in leading ensouled mortals to and from the underworld in accordance with Zeus' wishes. When Herakles is set the task of retrieving the three-headed Hound of Hades named Kerberos as his final Labour for King Eurystheus, he is accompanied by Hermes on both trips there and back again: first to get the snarly dog and then to return him once he had been shown to Eurystheus. Hermes also accompanied Theseus and Peirithous on their adventure into the world below; unfortunately, they were unable to join him in the ascent as they had allowed themselves to become trapped by the magic thrones in Hades' Halls when they attempted to rape Persephone during her regular time spent with the Lord of the underworld. It was Hermes, though, who first rescued her from her enforced visit with her uncle when he abducted her from the earth's surface while she was gathering flowers in a meadow (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 1-21).



Figure 6.4 'The raising of Persephone', Persephone painter, 440 BCE

The moment of her rising from below is captured in this Bell Krater by the Persephone painter dated to the 440s BCE (Figure 6.4): Persephone's body has almost fully emerged from below, her legs beneath the knees still being concealed by the earth; Hermes stands behind her with his *kerykeion* pointing down, clearly indicating that he has led the way and emerged from below first. Persephone is greeted by Hekate, who holds two torches, and her mother, Demeter, standing with her staff behind Hekate.

In another tale (Antoninus Liberalis *Metamorphoses* 33 = Pherekydes *FGrH* 3 F 84 Jacoby) when Alkmene, with whom Zeus had spent over twenty-four hours in love-making, died and was about to be buried, he directed Hermes to steal her body away and convey her to the Isle of the Blest where she would be wedded to Rhadamanthys (one of the underworld judges). So that no one would suspect the abduction, Hermes replaced her body with a stone. However, when the sons of Herakles lifted the coffin to convey it to the graveyard, they were surprised by the weight and decided to open it. Finding a stone instead of Alkmene's body, they set it up as a cult statue in order to commemorate her as a heroine (see also Pausanias 9.16.4; Plutarch *Romulus* 28.608). In this tale, Hermes' stealth is called upon to remove a body from a coffin without being seen, and this also serves to remind the tale's audience of Hermes' skill as a thief. In the context of the situation, however, two other aspects of Hermes' character and abilities are essential to success: first cooperation in the desire of Zeus to see that Alkmene be honoured and remembered, which required Hermes not just to steal away her body but to provide a suitable replacement for veneration later; and, second, his gifting as *Psychopompos*.¹⁹

Hermes is also a lingering presence in the context of the athletics arena, where death in competition is a real possibility, not only as Hermes *Agonios* ('God of Contests') but also as 'Conductor of Souls' and as the god who brings luck (or not). In this regard, Scanlon (2002: 318) observes that alongside Fate '[t]hese divinities underline the symbolic importance of the race as "the course of life," since that is their domain.' Hermes was understood to be present in the stadium as well as the *hippodrome* ('horse-running track'), as death was a not infrequent occurrence in events such as wrestling, the *pankraton*, discus-throwing and horse-racing, especially in chariot-racing.

Hermes overcomes his 'humble' beginning to become the god he was born to be; however, he does not become distant or even aloof as, for instance, Zeus and Apollo are thought to be: Hermes is the god in whose company humans can feel most comfortable, almost as though he were one of their own. The approachability of Hermes is given visual representation in scenes where the viewer sees someone hugging, patting or in some way making direct physical contact with a Herm (see *LIMC* 5.2: 206–16). Such contact with the statues of other gods is seldom if ever represented, unless the mortal is pictured in the posture of a suppliant. This easy familiarity which Hermes seems to invite is also represented in some of the extant epigrams. For instance, as if trying both to tantalise the god's senses and impress by an abundance of descriptors, a dedicant describes the array of foodstuffs he is gifting to Hermes *Enodios*, just as though he were describing the dinner menu to his guests at a feast (*Palatine Anthology* 6.299): Best (2015: 104) takes this as evidence for the very personal sort of worship that Hermes inspired in mortals. This laughter-generating, play-loving, musically gifted, creative and infinitely clever god overcame the austere and intimidating visage of the other gods to become the far more acceptable face of the Olympians in the mortal realm. Perhaps it was this very approachability and familiarity that worked to obscure (if not devalue) Hermes' importance to the successful running of Zeus' cosmos as time went on. Whether that is the case or not, Plutarch tells us that there was still a saying with which he was familiar that continued to convey a sense of the mystery of Hermes: whenever a conversation suddenly stopped, it was said, 'Hermes has entered' (*Concerning Talkativeness* 502 F 503A): only time would tell whether his arrival was for the purposes of dispensing favour or rescinding it.²⁰

p.119

OVERVIEW

Transcending the circumstances of his birth to be incorporated into the Olympian ruling hierarchy entails a subtle change and narrowing of uses to which Hermes' trickster-like abilities are put; however, those skills are still of use within Zeus' ordered cosmos. His brand of cleverness (re)introduced laughter and new forms of music and song to the world of gods and men, making play possible and thus lightening the load of mortals following the mortal/divine breach occasioned by Prometheus' ill-conceived attempt to out-smart Zeus. His cleverness also facilitated the restoration of relations between gods and men, offering mortals a model

for giving back some of what Prometheus had stolen from the gods at that fateful sacrifice at which men had won all the edible portions of the beast, leaving the gods with only fat and bones. It could even be said that Hermes, as the mediator, is the one who stands in between the two in order to bring about a relationship. Conceptually, then, Hermes' role in his father's cosmos is the same whether he is facilitating communication or trade, guiding mortals or leading souls to their final destination, dispensing divine favour or protecting property: by transcending obstacles and quite literally 'getting above it all,' he becomes the Olympians' expert in the art of making connections and creating relationships.²¹

NOTES

- 1 See Felson (2011) for discussion of mythical family dynamics. In pre-battle sacrifice the animal was pierced through the spinal cord rather than having its throat cut as would be the case when killing an animal in a normal blood sacrifice: see Jameson (1991); for typical blood-sacrifice, see van Straten (1995); Hägg and Alroth (2005); Naiden (2012); for sacrifice in hero cult, see Ekroth (2002).
 - 2 Burkert (1984: 845) observes: 'The order of the world, which takes place particularly in the fair distribution of the "gift of honour" to the gods and men, seems to find, among the Greeks as elsewhere, its legitimacy in sacrifice'. On the matter of generational succession, the only god to suggest this as a concern in the *Hymn* is Apollo: see Harrell (1991).
- p.120
- 3 On the static state of the cosmos, see Clay (1989: 96); Bungard (2011: 150); on the earth and Olympos as shared territory for all the gods including Hades, see *Iliad* (15: 187–94).
 - 4 Hermes is typically viewed as remaining a trickster on the fringes of Olympian society: see, for instance, Burkert (1984); however, Bungard (2011: 150) captures the situation best when he writes that Hermes 'needs a world that is full of surplus potential that can be exploited to restructure the cosmos – not for the sake of supplanting his elders, but to become integrated into their order'.
 - 5 On Hermes/Hestia and the household see Vernant (1983); Zografou (2010). P. Thompson (2002) offers a modern application of Vernant's insightful study to the relative valuation of female labour; for Hekate, see Berg (1974); Johnston (1990); for the political association between Hermes and Aphrodite, see Sokolowski (1964); Croissant and Salviat (1966); Marchetti (1993).
 - 6 For birth-order and privileges, see *Iliad* (15.185–93) where Poseidon's challenge to Zeus is overcome by the latter's appeal to the birth-order which privileges the elder-born in terms of legitimising his authority.
 - 7 Given that Zeus is speaking with Achilles' mother in *Iliad* (24.71–3), his words are likely to be a 'white lie' designed to demonstrate to Thetis Zeus' continuing respect for her and her son. Clearly, Hermes' ability to put everyone to sleep later in this book undermines his father's earlier explanation of Hermes' non-intervention.

- 8 Playing with Hermes' status as divine courier, Lord of Exchanges and Bringer of Luck, Lucian in his dialogue, *Timon*, has Zeus dispatch Hermes to lead the god Wealth to the 'man-hater' Timon at Athens so as to prosper him. For the importance and dangers of diplomacy, see Kelly (2016).
- 9 Griffith (2008: 182–3) endorses the idea that Hermes' *kerykeion* originated in the suppliant bough carried by those taking refuge at a god's altar or temple; similarly, fugitives seeking protection from a king or other leader would also carry such a 'wand' to identify themselves as suppliants, and become a leader's *therapon* at his discretion.
- 10 On Hermes in the form of his Herm overseeing other gods' sacrifices, see: van Straten (1995: 98); Furley (1995); Versnel (2011: 350) (following Jaillard 2001). Heiden (2010: 419) observes, 'The faux-thief agrees to accept punishment and thereby to legitimate it, but with the specific provision that a legitimate authority be a third party bearing the same fatherly personal relationship to the accused and the accuser alike.' Antoninus Liberalis reports one incident wherein Zeus dispatched Hermes to inflict punishment on two giants, Oreios and Agrios, and he chose to transform them into ill-omened birds (*Metamorphoses* 21.4.1–5.10).
- 11 Bungard (2011: 155) speaks of Hermes' 'clever manipulation of legalistic speech'. On the presence of legal procedures in the *Hymn*, see Papakonstantinou (2007); on the rhetorical quality of Hermes' speech see Knudsen (2012); Görgemanns (1976).
- 12 Briquel (1985: 82) refers to Hermes as an 'auxiliary of sovereignty'. For fuller discussion of the Herald's responsibilities in relation to Hermes, see Allan (2004: 52).
- 13 On the importance of the ancient road networks for commerce and the maintenance of connections between small villages, cities and city-states, see Fachard and Pirisino (2015).
- 14 The birth of Dionysos from Zeus' thigh was a popular subject for vase painters and several depictions of the event exist; see *LIMC* 5.2, 223–5. In other versions of the tale, Hermes brings Dionysos to different care-takers.
- 15 For general discussion of the uses of *astragali* see Greaves (2012) and Gilmour (1997); for the knucklebone inscribed with Hermes' name, see Bar-Oz (2001).
- 16 On the challenges of visually representing the departed *psyche*, see Jones (2015). For beliefs about contacting or encountering departed souls, see Johnston (1999).

p.121

- 17 De Jáuregui (2011) examines Priam's journey to reclaim the body of his son from Achilles' compound under Hermes' guidance as strongly suggestive of a *katabastic* journey with Hermes *Psychopompos* in the lead. Frame (1978: esp. 153) was the first to note descent features in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*; see now Cursaru (2014) and Reece (2007).
- 18 On ancient Greek necromancy, see Ogden (2001).
- 19 Hermes also leads the soul of Protesilaos back up from the underworld at the direction of Zeus to comfort his grieving widow Laodamia (Pseudo-Apollodorus *Epitome* 3.30; Ovid, *Heroides* 13). Hermes, under the epithet 'Chthonios', is also among the deities who are invoked when requesting permission to consult with souls during a necromancy, as in the two plays by Aischylos noted above.
- 20 Dillon (2015: esp. 250) discusses Hermes' openness to human contact; Haden (1983) similarly comments on the degree of intimacy that seems to be attained between Hermes and his worshippers. Larson (2016: 712) discusses the cognitive responses to

human faces informing people's reactions to divine images, including the Herms.

- 21 The same applies in his 'negative' actions (i.e., rescinding favour and neglecting property) insofar as these are typically a response to a mortal's prior violation of some established relationship; that is, they are instances of negative reciprocity.

7

TRANSLATIONS

As early as the ninth century BCE (if not earlier), the Greeks were setting up colonies and trading posts to the east and west of their homeland, both along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean in land now possessed by Turkey and the areas which the ancient Romans eventually named Palestine (modern-day Lebanon, Israel and that area currently called the Gaza Strip), as well as on the coasts and islands of modern-day Italy. For instance, at some point in the eighth century BCE they established their earliest western- and northern-most trading post at a place named Pithekousai on the island of Ischia (ancient Aenaria). By the seventh century, between 664 and 610 BCE, they also founded the trading centre of Naukratis on the coast of Egypt to the east of Alexandria. When the Greeks did so, these ancient settlers brought their gods with them and thus any non-Greek traders who frequented these ports are likely to have been introduced to these deities as well. As the Greek god who oversaw all types of exchange, it is highly probable that Hermes was among the first, if not the very first, of the Greeks' gods to be encountered by such people.

HERMES GOES WEST

Not unexpectedly, in the polytheistic societies to be found around the Mediterranean basin in antiquity, there was an understandable tendency for people from different cultures to attempt to make sense of another people's gods in terms of their own. It is generally believed that the indigenous peoples of Italy adapted their own sets of gods to that of the colonising Greeks quite early in the history of the Italian peninsula. In Q. Fabius Pictor's third-century BCE chronicle of early Rome, the Romans represent themselves as colonisers who had fled from Troy to settle eventually in the area that would become Rome. There they encountered the progeny of earlier Greek migrants from Arcadia: that, at least, is the

history of Rome as told by the poet Virgil in his *Aeneid* (8.97–174) and the Roman historian, Livy, in his *Foundations of Rome* (1.1–5), each from the first century BCE and informed, in part, by Fabius' work. With regard to the gods, the implication is that at least some of those Aeneas brought with him from Troy were very similar to, if not the same as, the ones he and the others found being worshipped by the descendants of Arcadian Evander when they arrived (i.e., Hermes, Pan and Nikê), although clearly differently named.¹

p.123

That said, another cultural grouping, which also inhabited the Italian peninsula and appears in the history of Rome as a group with whom the Romans eventually had to fight, were the Etruscans. De Grummond (2006) has revealed that this people group had their own set of explanatory tales, often involving divine and heroic/sacred figures who look as if they are involved in situations similar to those which appear in Greek and Roman sacred narratives. In the Etruscans' pantheon of gods there was one named Turms, and he appears in depictions of events reminiscent of ones in which the Greeks would expect to see their Hermes. For instance, in one scene Turms appears as the leader of three female figures (likely goddesses) to an awaiting male: if this is not a depiction of the 'Judgement of Paris' as known to us from Greek versions, it is certainly suggestive of it. However, Turms' involvement as guide, which mirrors Hermes, does not mean that these two gods were thought of as being exactly the same; rather it suggests that they had certain honours and attributes which permitted observers to see similarities. Take, for instance, Turms' status as a kouroutrophic deity: even though Hermes also served in this capacity, this activity seems to have been a more significant one for Turms among the Etruscans than it was for Hermes among the Greeks. Turms also seems to have been a frequent presence at the uttering of prophecies, according to some interpretations of extant artistic depictions. It is of particular interest that in Etruscan thought this god can appear not only with a caduceus and attributes typically associated with the underworld, but also as a pair of twins, implying perhaps a dual identity as a god of above and of below. Despite this, there is reason to believe that Turms' relationship with the underworld was not that of a *Psychopompos*, as the Etruscans would seem to have envisioned the transition from life to death rather differently and to have other guardian-like deities who oversaw the movement between realms of the living and the dead. The evidence suggests rather that Turms' business in the underworld was as a messenger, and that he functioned in Etruscan sacred narratives primarily as such for all realms,

just as Hermes does in Greek tales.²

In an intriguing discussion of a scene etched on the back of an Etruscan mirror, Wiseman (1995) creates a bridge between the Hermes-like Turms in Etruria and the Hermes-like god known as Mercury at Rome. A Roman tale underlying a ceremony called the Feralia, which was a festival of the dead, held on 21 February, is related by Ovid (*Fasti* 2.583–616) and tells how Mercury, while leading the nymph Lara into the underworld wholly alive at the direction of Jupiter, took a fancy to the young female and impregnated her against her will, making her the mother of twins. These twins, known as the Lares, became the guardian spirits of the household and their images were housed in a niche called a Lararium. Represented as two youths each carrying a libation jug (*rhyton*) and offering plate (Greek, *phialê*; Latin, *patera*) and clothed in garments made from dog's skin (Plutarch, *Roman Questions* 51), their age and attire point both to the fatherhood of Mercury and the extension of a dog's (and Hermes') guarding function to them. This is further enhanced by images of a dog at the feet of the Lares.

The great esteem in which these sons of Mercury were held is suggested by the fact that the Lararium housing their statuettes was located in the innermost and private room of the house. Suetonius reports that both Augustus and Domitian, two of Rome's early emperors, maintained the practice of worshipping the Lares in a Lararium located in their respective bedrooms (Suetonius *Augustus* 7.2; *Domitian* 17.5), as was typical of the average Roman household. Morning prayers and offering typically included them and Mercury in company with other gods. According to Robert Turcan (2001: 15), the Lares, and Mercury, as well as Bacchus and Venus (Greek Dionysos and Aphrodite, respectively), were especially important to the paterfamilias (the head of a Roman family). Additionally, the Lares, when referred to as the Lares Compitalia, were worshipped as guardians of the city's crossroads (3–5 January) – a place typically associated with Hermes and Hekate in Greek thought as indicated by Epigram (9.314) in the *Palatine Anthology*, which may offer additional support for the formation of guilds named after Mercury and Maia who tended to this festival. When the Lares have the epithet Praestites, they were celebrated on 1 May as the Protectors of Rome (*Fasti* 2.611–16). Later in the year, in the month of May – nine months before the Feralia according to the Roman calendar – in addition to the Festival for Mercury on the 15th, there was a second festival of the dead called the Lemura (9, 11, 13 May). Given the gestation period of a mortal infant and the connection of Mercury with festivals held nine months apart, it would seem that the Romans may have initially acknowledged Mercury as the father of their civic guardians, even though there is no explicit extant evidence to that effect. Additionally, unless Ovid is making play with the

various unexpressed connections to be inferred from the underlying sacred narratives, there is also just a hint of an earlier and perhaps no longer strong association between Mercury and youth as is found with Greek Hermes: the fact that the household Lares received dedications from young men as they passed from youth to adulthood is reminiscent of the dedications Greek youths gave to Hermes on crossing that same temporal boundary.³

p.124

ROMAN MERCURY

Not surprisingly, in conjunction with the changes wrought to the gods' names as they were (adaptively) translated into Latin, the gods generally, and Hermes in particular, underwent some subtle and some not-so-subtle changes in the process. This meant retaining most of the honours and abilities held by Hermes in the stories told of Mercury in Latin, but shedding some of the divine functions held by Hermes in the practice of everyday religion among the Romans. Most especially, there is little evidence to suggest that Mercury received prayers or offerings as the Divine Guide of Wayfarers from ordinary travellers: indeed, the Roman geographer Strabo seems almost amused by the frequency with which he encounters roadside Herms in ancient Greece (*Geography* 8.343). The Romans did set up distance markers when they built their roads, but these were not in the form of Greek Herms. In fact, rather than seeing a Herm as a religious vehicle through which one might speak to the god, by the first century BCE Cicero sees it as an *objet d'art*, which he is pleased to acquire so as to adorn the grounds of his palaestra (*Letters to Atticus* 9.1.4). However, in this particular instance what he actually acquired was a Hermathena Herm; that is, a Herm with the head and shoulders of Hermes on one side and those of Athena on the other. On another occasion while complaining about four statues that had been acquired for him, he expresses dismay at the news that a statue of Mars rather than of Mercury has been purchased to adorn his exercise grounds (*De familiae* 7.23.2). Nevertheless, despite the fact that Cicero himself may not venerate statues as divine, he clearly shows his understanding that others certainly do when he is able to exploit this belief and the veneration of gods through their statues in his speech as prosecutor of G. Verres (*Verrines* 2.4.84). Here Cicero charges the accused with stealing a statue of Mercury given to the Tyndaritans through the benevolence of Scipio Africanus, to which these people gave annual worship. Cicero refers to this incident involving Mercury thrice more in his (undelivered) second speech to convict Verres (2.4.87, 88, 92). The repetition of the god's name

and of the offence also suggests that his audience would have viewed the theft of a venerated object, especially one given by Scipio Africanus, as utterly abhorrent: it would also be viewed as a violation against the god of reciprocal exchanges.⁴

p.125

Mercury, following in Hermes' footsteps, maintained an association with exchanges; however, for the Romans he was far more narrowly a god of trade and traders. For instance, in the early years of the Roman Republic (496/5 BCE), the Romans built a temple for Mercury next to the Circus Maximus on the lower slope of the Palatine (Livy 2.21.7, 27.5–6; Valerius Maximus 9.3.6). There, each year on the Ides (15th) of May (named after Maia, a Roman goddess who early on merged with Mercury's 'Greek' mother), Mercury was venerated as Lord of Commerce (Livy 2.21.5; Ovid *Fasti* 5.663–92) by guilds (*collegia*) of merchants and, as such, he retained his lordship over the central trading districts in the ancient Roman cities, the so-called 'marketplaces' (Latin, *fora*). Mercury, in fact, seems to derive his Latin name from the stem, *merx* ('goods', hence English 'merchandise' and 'merchant'), suggesting that the movement of goods and those who moved them were both deeply imbedded associations maintained by the god. The very first time Romans minted bronze coins (c. 280–276 BCE), it was Mercury's winged, helmeted head they chose to use for one side of the coin (an *as*, their primary denomination), with Janus on the other; this pairing appeared again on the *as* between 241 and 235 BCE, suggesting that Mercury (and Janus) had come to be a god of some particular significance to the minters and users of these coins during these two periods. Almost two centuries later, when writing to Quintus (*Letters to Quintus* 2.6), Cicero reports on the expulsion of a certain M. Furius Flaccus from the societies of the Capitolini and of the Mercurilles due to his ignoble character. The latter society was a guild of men with commercial interests, such as importers/exporters and large-scale traders, clearly naming themselves after the god who oversaw all exchanges and concerned that their members not be viewed as untrustworthy. Ogilvie (1969: 11) suggested that difficulties with the supply of corn in the early fifth century BCE and the onset of epidemic-like illness motivated the erection of the temple to Mercury as a way of appeasing the god who gave his favour to merchants.⁵

Although certainly not as prominent as his patronage of merchants, the poet Ovid may have retained an element of Hermes' association with *xenia* and the proper reception of guests in his telling of the Baucis and Philemon story, where Mercury appears alongside Jupiter. At *Metamorphoses* (8.651–60), he notes the manner in which this couple

prepared their home to receive their unexpected guests and it just happens to mirror the way in which the gods, including Mercury, are honoured at an annual festival at Rome described by the first-century BCE historian Livy. He reports (*The Foundation of Rome* 5.13.6–8, 7.2.2, 7.27.1, 8.25.1) that the religious rite known as the *Lectisternium* was instituted around 399 BCE, in response to a plague, and it coheres remarkably well to the Greek *theoxenia* ritual. It was celebrated officially at state level, but also like Baucis and Philemon's hosting of the gods, the festival was mirrored in private homes where tables of food were prepared and couches draped so that anyone passing by might receive the hospitality on offer by simply entering through the open door. Even though he was not the only god whose statue was placed on the finely dressed couches, the very fact that he appears both in the festival and in Ovid's tale of hospitality extended and rewarded suggests that in some more subtle ways Hermes' connection to less mercantile forms of exchange remained alive in Mercury.⁶

p.126

LITERARY MERCURY

In the literature of the Romans, whether retelling a Greek tale with the requisite name changes to Latin ones, or passing on a particularly Roman story in poetic or narrative form, Mercury often appears in very similar roles and situations as would Hermes in our earliest extant Latin texts from the last two centuries BCE and in those written four centuries later. For instance, in the sixth book of the *Metamorphoses* (6.7), a second-century CE tale by Apuleius, Venus ascends to Olympus and insists that Mercury be allowed to accompany her back to earth where he is to assist her. Zeus assents to her demand, and once back on earth she directs Mercury to make a public announcement describing her servant Psyche and calling for her immediate return. The god hastened to do as directed, telling each person he came across to meet him in the Circus Maximus at the shrine of Venus Murcia if they had any information (6.8). Once Psyche's location had been ascertained, Jupiter directed Mercury to call a divine assembly and, after addressing the assembly, he also ordered Mercury to fetch Psyche to Olympus immediately (Figure 7.1).

This tale of Psyche's translation to the immortal realm became a very popular scene to depict in frescoes, murals and other media in the Renaissance. Here the painter has chosen to illustrate the moment when Mercury has given Psyche the ambrosial liquid to drink so that her marriage to Cupid would be eternal (6.23). It is important to note that in

this tale, even though Mercury is acting on Venus' command, he had been authorised by Jupiter to serve as her messenger and 'Herald' in calling an assembly for mortals; thereafter he returns to his primary status as Jupiter's Herald and convenes a meeting of the gods.

p.127



Figure 7.1 Raphael (1483–1520), 'Mercury offering Psyche the cup of immortality', detail from the ceiling fresco of the Council of the Gods in the Loggia of Psyche, ca. 1517

Later on in this same story, while Apuleius' mortal character, Lucius, was still in the form of a mule, he witnessed a play on the Judgement of Paris in which a young boy, clad only in a cloak, with wings protruding through his hair and a caduceus in his hand appeared in the role of Mercury presenting Paris with the Apple of Discord (10.30), an indication, perhaps, of the popularity of the tale among the Romans. Later on, after Lucius has been transformed back into a man, he witnesses a sacred ritual in honour of Isis in which a priest processed holding both a palm branch and a caduceus like that of Mercury. In these two incidents we can see the retention and extension of Hermes' offices through Mercury to new situations.⁷

These images and activities also appeared in Virgil's earlier presentation of the god. In dealing with Mercury's preparation and journey to earth (*Aeneid* 4.238-78), Jones (1987) notes that Virgil (first century BCE) presents a very Homeric image of the divine messenger donning his sandals and taking up his wand, including his bird-like flight over land and sea, and thus offers his readers a very Greek version of their Mercury. Similarly, in Mercury's speech to Aeneas and his response, the latter's obligations to his son are indicated through the use of judicial terms. For instance, at 4.272, 274-6 Mercury makes reference of Aeneas' heirs and the hopes of his son which would be dashed if Aeneas were to stay in Carthage. According to Mercury (4.262-3), founding the new kingdom on Italian soil is a debt he owes to his son. It is of some interest, then, that Mercury would phrase his appeal to Aeneas in these terms, given Hermes' very personal concern over the obligation Zeus as a father owes his own son in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*. However, unlike Homer's Hermes, Virgil's Mercury is not bound to repeat Jupiter's words verbatim; rather he seems to be at liberty to represent his father's will in accordance with the needs of the situation, here taking on a far more persuasive approach than Jupiter's exact words afforded.⁸

Vergil's poetic contemporary, Horace, turns out to be the best source for the earliest form of the tale reporting Hermes' theft of Apollo's cattle which pre-dated the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*: his *Odes* 1.10 is all about Mercury. Over the course of four stanzas, Horace presents the god's primary attributes and achievements (stanza 1); his activities in the heavens (stanza 2); those on earth (stanza 3); and those beneath the earth

(stanza 4). This Ode is a celebration of Mercury, from his laughter-generating antics enacted after his birth through his risky gambit with the slaughter of two cows and his audacious ascent to Olympus, right on to his acceptance among the gods and his subsequent cult. As Horace indicates, even the gods are delighted by him and grateful towards him (1.10.19–20). In addition to the value of this ode as evidence of the wholesale adoption of Greek tales about this god by the Romans, what makes it so significant from a literary-historical perspective is the information it provides about the likely content of the lost sixth-century BCE poem by Alkaias, which dealt with the early thieving activities of Hermes, including his absconding with the cattle of the Apollo (as discussed by Cairns 1983; Lyne 2005). While for Greeks, Hermes' lordship over stock animals in particular was a significant aspect of his divinity, this is not an aspect of Mercury's lordship upon which Latin poets comment; rather, his status in the mercantile arena of human endeavour was a popular point of reference in several authors from the second century BCE through to the first century CE.⁹

For instance, already at Rome in the 100s BCE, the comic playwright, Plautus, in his *Poenulus* (1.327–8) could make a joke involving Mercury not being a lover of loss, when one character implies that another's love is 'costing' him dearly. This plays on both Mercury's inherited mercantile interests and his sexual acquisitiveness. In Plautus' *Amphitryo* (1–25), Mercury is given the role of prologue-speaker and the first thing he does is initiate a 'deal' between himself and the audience; he will provide them with material blessings in exchange for their rapt attention and a 'fair hearing'. Apparently he has come to deliver a petition from none other than Jupiter for the appointment of inspectors at competitive theatrical events who are to ensure that all is run in good order. To this end, no performer or person acting on his behalf is to solicit a prize. Here again Mercury's acquisitiveness is at play, now in conjunction with his status as Jupiter's envoy and his own lordship over contests and luck. Later on Mercury appears again, using his position as Jupiter's spokesman to gain attention, even though at this particular moment he is not on official business.¹⁰

So, too, perhaps the two most famous first-century BCE poets, Horace and Ovid, find it appropriate to acknowledge Mercury's oversight of matters of exchange. Horace, in his *Sermon* (2.3), twice makes reference to Mercury in his mercantile aspects, first when he reports that due to his own success in buying and selling property at a profit, people have given him the name 'Mercury's friend' and, a little later, when he questions whether someone is in his right mind to 'scorn the gift of Mercury'; he had offered to give them money they need not return, but of course, according to the rules of reciprocity (which the Romans seem to have adopted with

little modification), to accept the offer of money entailed being put under obligation just as surely as refusing to take it can be interpreted as an insult and lead to negative reciprocal action. It seems Horace is offering a choice between the lesser of two evils in this little hypothetical situation over which Mercury would preside. But still, in *Odes* (2.27.29–30) Horace refers to himself as ‘Mercury’s man’ and credits the god with not only (indirectly) saving his life (2.7.9–13) and his farm, but with making it prosperous as well (*Satires* 2.5–15). Likewise, Petronius in his *Satyricon* (77) (perhaps ‘tongue-in-cheek’) has a character claim that Mercury watched over him while he built his house, which has now become a mansion. In the same work (*Satyricon* 29), Mercury’s advancement of individuals is given visual expression when the interpreter of a fresco sees Trimalchio being hurled to a throne in the heavens which is attended by Fortune and the three Fates spinning golden threads. Even if Trimalchio’s claims are exaggerated, that Mercury did oversee the protection and growth of household wealth is materially evidenced by a number of terracotta money-boxes with his image on the exterior recovered from excavations of Roman sites.¹¹

p.129

Ovid, in addition to chronicling the establishment of Mercury’s festival on 15 May at the temple constructed in 495 BCE, clearly and humorously links both temple and festival with the god’s oversight of merchants. But he also provides a detail on the manner in which the merchants sought the god’s beneficence over their businesses for the coming year: apparently, they each went down to one the city’s gates, called the Porta Capena, situated between the Palantine and Caelean Hills. There they each drew water from a spring or fountain with a purified pitcher and, after wetting a laurel branch, he sprinkled water from the branch over himself and his wares. Given that the spring seems to have been located close to this entrance-way to the city, it is possible that such anointing was believed to grant the merchants safe passage for themselves and their goods as they entered and left the Circus Maximus. Still, it seems curious that no specific spring or fountain is named in Ovid’s account, and there may be reason for this.

In the *Fasti* (5.663–92) the sacred narrator describes Mercury, patron of the merchants’ festival, as being celebrated in a manner most similar to Horace’s rehearsal of the god’s attributes and offices in his *Odes* 1.10. What Ovid omits from this description is a quality which he deflects onto the merchants who venerate Mercury on this day: the thievishness and deceptive qualities of Horace’s god appear in the merchants’ reported prayer when they ask Mercury to ignore their own perjuries and those

profits gained by deception in the past (and in the future!) and to continue extending his favour to their enterprises. At this, Ovid tells us, Mercury smiles, responding positively to their prayers and offerings (5.691–2). Perhaps the smile is also occasioned by the fact that the merchants’ ‘spring’ is actually the waters from Aqua Marcia which ‘spring’ from the leaky aqueduct over the Porta Capena: in a sense, they ‘borrow’ (or less politely, ‘steal’) their water for the purifying protection sprinkled over themselves and their goods. The worship given to the patron god of commerce here is one of the few instances where the ‘trickster’-like qualities associated with the Greek Hermes make an appearance in relation to Roman Mercury, but then only by association rather than by direct attribution. The implication, however, seems clear: if this is how merchants conduct business and they prosper, then the god must approve.¹²

p.130

It is difficult to determine the extent to which Ovid’s later audiences believed his details of the merchant’s regular practices; there may be a grain of truth contained in the description, but there is reason to doubt the total veracity of their reported prayer. Rauh (1993: 175–7) has shown how already in the third century BCE the slave-traders on Delos while under Roman control had developed the fine art of swearing an oath to their own advantage without perjuring themselves, and even how, with Mercury as patron god, they might gain favour as both oath-keepers and oath-breakers; however, the merchants’ prayer in Ovid is beyond even this. Indeed, their reported prayer is self-consciously humorous, even if they may share Mercury’s enthusiasm for that which can best be described by the Greek term *kerdios* (that is, ‘self-interested choices,’ and more simply that which is ‘personally profitable’). What is beyond doubt is that Mercury received cult (prayers, libations and offerings) from Roman merchants as the patron deity of their guilds: so, for instance, we know from an inscription that there was a group of men who formed a guild under the auspices of both Mercury and Dionysos, because the merchandise they marketed was wine (ILS 7276).¹³

POLITICAL MERCURY

The merchants had certainly become a significant segment of the population in Roman society already in 495 BCE given that they were permitted to honour the god who oversaw their activities by means of a dedicated temple and an annually recurring festival. But it was not only the merchants who benefited from a positive relationship with the god:

the whole society depended on the ready supply of goods not just to survive but to thrive. It would not come as a surprise then if emperors sought to associate themselves with Mercury, the god who facilitated growth in trade and the general well-being of the people. Evidence suggests that the exploitation of just such a relationship between ruler and god had already begun to develop during the Hellenistic period when Hermes became the patron of several rulers, perhaps informed by another trend appearing in the Hellenistic period. In some areas of Greece, such as Argos, Megalipolis, Knidos and Lesbos, from the third to first centuries BCE, there is evidence that Hermes, usually in company with Aphrodite, was considered a guardian of civic magistrates. In this dual guardianship, Hermes oversaw financial matters while Aphrodite could oversee either those involved in maritime commerce or the orderly peace of the citizenry and their legislators (Sokolowski 1964).¹⁴

The earliest Roman political leader to use the image and symbolism of Mercury (for whom we have evidence) was Octavian who chose to feature Mercury on some of his coins. This was a comparatively subtle way of indicating that the ruler had the deity's support; however, it could also be used to imply divine descent. Evidence suggests this emperor, better known as Augustus, went somewhat further in allowing himself to be associated (if, in fact, he did not associate himself) with Mercury as the divine emissary of Jupiter to the Roman people, in effect implying that his directives had come via Mercury from Jupiter himself. Horace certainly endorses the connection between emperor and god when he concludes his *Odes* 1.2 with Mercury made visible in Augustus. Two images of Augustus give further support to the association: one is a carved gemstone with a caduceus beside the head of the emperor and the other is a fresco which was found in cubiculum E in the Villa Della Farnesia in which Octavian's face appears on two Hermes statues. One of the indicators that Augustus at least accepted if not wholly endorsed the association is the survival of coins minted during his reign with an image of Mercury or a Hermes Herm on the reverse. Another indicator may be the depiction of Mercury (representative of prosperity) in combination with Hercules (representative of safety) as they ascended the steps to the temple of Concordia. A third indicator is the fact that Augustus essentially usurped the festivals associated with the Lares Compitalia and Praestites when he had his own name inserted into the name of the guild that oversaw the events: the *ministri Mercurii Maiiae* (servant of Mercury and Maia) became at first the *ministri Mercurii Maiiae Augusti* (servants of Mercury Maia and Augustus, *CIL* x. 109, from Pompeii) and eventually simply *ministri Augusti* (servants of Augustus) in 2 BCE. In the last instance it would seem that the veneration of the genius of the emperor supplanted that of the Lares Compitalia and Praestites. Even so, as Mercury was father

of the Lares, the usurpation of this cult served to maintain the supposed relationship between Augustus and Mercury even as the emperor's own genius became the subject of veneration.¹⁵

p.131

But Augustus was not the last of the emperors to be associated with Mercury. Although certainly not the most popular of the gods among the Romans to take as one's patron deity, Caligula would often dress as Mercury in public, while Nero decided to have himself portrayed in the likeness of Mercury in sculptural form, as did Domitian at least twice. According to Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 34.45), a builder named Zenodotus, who created a large statue of Mercury for Nero, had previously spent ten years building a gigantic Mercury at the god's shrine in the Puy de Dom̄e in Gaul. Marcus Aurelius also authorised a series of coins which bore the image of Mercury – perhaps the most famous of which is the *sestertius* struck in 172/3 ce – which were produced particularly for use in Greece and the eastern provinces where the ruler-god relationship had been well established. Dio (*Roman History* 73.17.4, 19.4) also records that the Emperor Commodus made public appearances in the guise of the god in addition to having a statue of Mercury made in his likeness. More subtly, perhaps, the Emperor Julian represents himself being given the golden staff of guidance by none other than Hermes himself (*Oration* 7.234b), suggesting that like Augustus before him, he is the emperor on whom the restoration of true religion depends.¹⁶

One new aspect of Roman Mercury that seems to arise in conjunction with Augustus' close association with the god is the former's association with peace, especially in the poets who wrote in praise of the emperor. Thus, Ovid composing on either side of the turn of the millennium refers to 'Cyllenius, bringer of the blessing of peace' (*Metamorphoses* 14.291ff.) and he is followed by Pseudo-Hyginus (*Astronomica* 2.7) who, in the second century ce, tells the tale of how the caduceus came to have its two entwined snakes: by laying his unadorned staff between two fighting snakes who then ceased fighting, Mercury declared his own staff to have been empowered to bring peace. This makes the god himself 'the peace bringer' because the caduceus is his and his alone. One other source, which may be as early as the third century BCE or as late as the second century ce, says simply that 'Hermes holds the irreproachable rod of peace' (*Orphic Hymn 28 to Hermes*, 7); without a secure date for *Orphic Hymn 28*, it is likely that Ovid was the first to offer this understanding of Mercury and his caduceus, especially when viewed in conjunction with Augustus' association with the god: Augustus was most venerated for being the emperor who restored peace to Rome and her territories, and in

conjunction with his (probably) self-chosen identification with Mercury as emissary of Jupiter, it would seem that Mercury himself became styled as the 'god of peace'.¹⁷

p.132

'INTERPRETATIO ROMANA'

Mercury may have developed other aspects to his divinity as the Romans went west with their gods. When they encountered new peoples and foreign gods, the newcomers attempted to identify their own gods among the deities in the foreign pantheons. Tacitus' *Germania* (43.3) provides us with the first extant use of the expression '*interpretatio romana*' ('Roman interpretation') in the context of identifying a foreign god with a familiar Roman one when describing the Romans' encounter with the Germanic peoples: on learning of the offices on their god Odin (or Woden), he was equated with Roman Mercury. Tacitus also notes that the most important gods among the Germans were Mercury and Hercules (*Germania* 9.1), whom he identifies as Odin and Thor (respectively). Julius Caesar had earlier reported (*Gallic Wars* 6.17) that the Gauls particularly favoured 'Mercury', whom they viewed as the originator of all the arts in addition to serving as their guide when on journeys – including organised marches – and the one who oversaw commercial transactions and increases in prosperity. Clearly this is Caesar taking note of activities overseen by a local god as reported by an informant, whose areas of oversight reminded Caesar of Mercury. The connections between Woden/Odin, Mercury and commerce seem to have been the area of shared oversight of particular significance: Woden's Day (which gives us our day-name for the fourth day of the week, i.e. Wednesday) was a market-day for both the Gauls and the Romans. It is highly probable that the Gauls' god had concerns that did not fit with Mercury's own, but these are not mentioned by Caesar. Perhaps merely through habitual repetition, Minucius Felix, a third-century Christian author, could report quite simply that the Gauls worshipped Mercury (*Octavius* 6) as if it had always been so.¹⁸

We certainly do have physical evidence that the Celts in the British Isles adopted and adapted images of Roman Mercury in the representation of their gods who shared in his activities. Two of these were Cernunnos and Lugh (Lug or Lugos). Along with a hoard containing coins of Constantine (306–337 ce) and Constantius (337–361 ce) and a brooch, a limestone relief was uncovered in 1997 at Aldsworth in Gloucestershire (England) depicting a male and female figure determined to be Mercury and Minerva. Mercury stands nude, his head winged, holding in his right hand

a money bag and in his left a caduceus, with a bird of some sort near his feet and a ram to his left beneath the caduceus. The image is paralleled by two others, one of which was found on a votive altar. Three other reliefs from Gloucestershire, as well as one found in Cirencester, depict a Mercury-like figure in company with a female identified as the Gaulic Rosmerta, who holds a sceptre and ladle with a pail. Also suggesting an adoption or adaptations of Mercury's associations by the Celts are a significant number of brooches depicting cockerels, as this was one of the god's companion animals alongside the tortoise and the ram. Nevertheless, although the Celts accepted the application of the Latin name to their god, the items added to his image suggest a slightly different understanding of him. Perhaps more significantly when pairing 'Mercury' with the female deity Rosmerta, it cannot be assumed that Mercury is the dominant member of the pair: Rosmerta, as indigenous goddess, may well have been viewed as the superior (or more important) of the pair, making Mercury's relationship to her similar to that which he held in relation to Jupiter.¹⁹

p.133

Another example of this associative tendency can be found in the fourth-century ce *Berne scholia* on a passage in Lucan's *Pharsalia*. According to the scholiast, the Celtic god Teutates was seen as either Mercury or Mars – but so too was Esus. The hesitancy to make a firm identification suggests that a limited but differing number of honours were matched between the Celtic god and one or the other of the Roman's, frustrating any clear one-to-one correspondence and rendering Lucan's 'interpretation' tentative at best. Dumézil's observation on the problem with the *interpretatio romana* articulates the outsider's view quite well and is applicable to the gods of all the peoples the Romans 'conquered':

One of the reasons for the difficulty in getting a clear view of the Gallo-Roman divinities stems from the fact that a number of them are called 'Mars', or 'Mercury' or 'Apollo' by virtue of fragmentary and variable analogies with these Roman gods, while in essential points these various Marses, Mercurys and Apollos were extremely different.

(1996: v. 1, 256)²⁰

HERMES GOES EAST

Before and during Hermes' travels to Rome and further west, the Greeks were taking this god with them as they moved eastward and to the south

for trading and settlement opportunities. Archaeological evidence indicates that Hermes was regularly depicted in reliefs on temples and other buildings throughout the area of modern-day Turkey and well into the lands of present-day Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and even farther inland well before Alexander the Great brought his troops through these areas (see [Figure 0.2](#)). For instance, as guardian of doorways and passages, Hermes appeared in several reliefs on and around the great temple of Ephesian Artemis at Ephesus. He was also the recipient of cult in Sardis at least as early as the fifth century BCE (Greenewalt 1976). It would not be surprising then if Hermes in these places and further afield throughout the 'Near East' had an influence on or was influenced by one or more indigenous deities.²¹

MESOPOTAMIAN/BABYLONIAN 'HERMES'

This seems to have been the case in the encounter between the local deity Nebo and Hermes in an area which is today known as Iraq: at a city called Hatra this local deity, a son of the great god Marduk, seems to have shared many of Hermes' own interests. Al-Salihi (1983) discusses a sculptural relief located in the corner of a small shrine, most likely dating from the Seleucid period, which may depict Nebo with the attributes of Hermes. Nebo was a god of wisdom, and lord of the arts associated with writing, making him chief assistant to his father, Marduk. Found in the shrine was an eight-sided bank, on which was depicted a figure with a winged head, holding a money bag, and carrying a caduceus. These are clearly the attributes of Hermes; however, whether this is a depiction of him as protector of the bank in service to Nebo or the figure of Nebo with Hermes's attributes cannot be determined.

p.134

In the Babylonians' religious pantheon, Nebo was also equated with the concept *Mummu*, equivalent to the Greek *logos* according to Langdon (1918), who observes that Nebo was 'He without whom no counsel in heaven is issued.' From this it appears that Nebo and Hermes had something else in common: like the latter-named deity, Nebo was also honoured as the divine messenger. Again, caution is necessary regarding this office as it is hard to say whether Nebo was such before the Babylonians were introduced to Hermes: perhaps here the influence of the imported god on the duties of the indigenous one is to be seen as Nebo becomes 'messenger' in assimilation to Hermes.²²

Despite this early association of Graeco-Roman Hermes with the

Babylonian Nebo, the 'Hermes' with which the later Arabs were familiar was not the Greek Hermes, but the Egyptian god whom the Greek residents in that country had identified first and foremost with the scribal god Thoth (Thot, Thuth – spelling varies). Their unfamiliarity with the Greek (and later Roman) god is the result of their temporal difference from the active worship of Hermes/Mercury: by the time the Muslim scholars were engaging with writings from the west, the Greek gods had long since become characters in stories and no longer retained the vitality of 'real' divine powers (Walbridge 1998). Such was not the case with 'Hermes' from Egypt.

EGYPTIAN HERMES

In contrast to the five different 'Hermes' that Cicero (*De Natura Deorum* 3.56–7, 59–60) could identify in the first century BCE, the Muslims knew of only three: the first was an antediluvian figure from Egypt who built the pyramids and was equated with Enoch; the second resided in Babylonian and was credited with restoring scientific knowledge to men after the flood; the third and final Hermes is an Egyptian teacher of Asclepius who imparted 'hidden' knowledge (*gnosis*) to his pupils. Underlying all three of these Arab figures stands the Egyptian god Thoth, especially in his later manifestation as Hermes Trismegistos ('Thrice-greatest') ([Figure 7.2](#)).²³

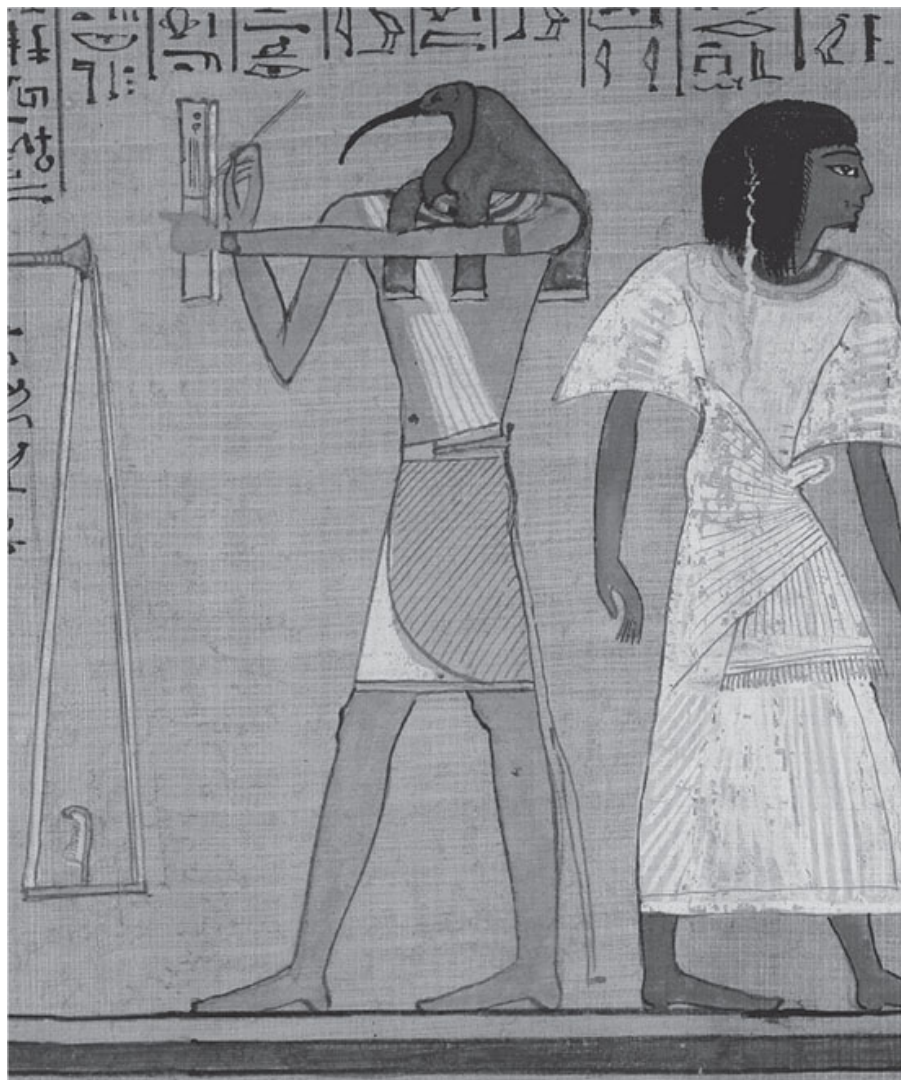


Figure 7.2 Ibis-headed Thoth in Egyptian Book of the Dead, Thebes, ca. 1275 BCE

British Museum, London, Great Britain / © The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource, NY

Before Thoth became ‘Trismegistos,’ however, he was typically depicted as the ibis-headed deity: this is because Thoth was the Egyptian scribal god and the ibis’ long, fine beak was thought to resemble a stylus. Such, then, was the most appropriate form for the god credited with the invention of writing and venerated as the keeper of knowledge to take. Given that these were two of his most significant duties in the Egyptian pantheon, it seems that Thoth struck Greek traders and those newly resident Greeks in Egypt as a ‘natural’ manifestation of their Hermes in

that foreign land. Because of Hermes' standing as messenger of Zeus, he too was privy to secret knowledge and was already thought of as creator of the Greek alphabet. Yet another of Thoth's duties, which would have facilitated the association between Greek Hermes and this Egyptian god, was to stand as witness to the weighing of the souls in the scales of destiny. Given that Hermes was associated with the task of overseeing a similar set of scales in archaic Greece, it was not difficult to see Hermes in Thoth in this activity as well.²⁴

Who was the first and how early it happened is a matter of debate; however, at some point, at least as early as the sixth century BCE, Greeks and Egyptians were starting to see similarities between their gods. In the fifth century BCE, Herodotus (*Histories* 2.138) certainly recognises Greek gods in the Egyptian pantheon, going so far as to suggest that the Greek pantheon actually came from Egypt. By the time of the Ptolemies, the association was well established, including the equation of Hermes with Thoth.²⁵



Figure 7.3 'Hermanubis', bronze miniature, c. first to second century ce

Christie's, London; HIP / Art Resource, NY

But Thoth was not the only Egyptian god with which Hermes was

associated: as the god who conducted the souls to the underworld, Hermes was recognised in Anubis, the god who serves in this capacity in the *Pyramid Texts* (Figure 7.3).

Again, the fit is not exact, as Anubis was the god who also presided over funerary rites, whereas there is no evidence to suggest that Hermes was charged with this duty in the Greek funerary ritual. Nevertheless, it is possible that in addition to their shared status as *Psychopompoi*, the association was facilitated by Anubis' animal representation: he was the god with the dog's head, and certainly for the Greeks, Hermes was the male god most associated with dogs. The simultaneous integration and separation of the two deities is best exemplified by the name Hermanubis which, while a blend of both names, gained visual representation in the figure of a dog (or jackal)-headed man with the religious attributes of Egyptian ritual, the palm branch and *sistrum*, a musical instrument, rather any symbolic references to Hermes. This was not a deity warmly embraced by the Romans; especially as a simple dog-headed man-god, Anubis was found laughable (Juvenal, *Satire* 6.534).²⁶

p.137

There may have been an additional reason for the Romans' rejection of the association of their Mercury with Egyptian Anubis: despite the continuity in Roman literature of Mercury acting like Hermes *Psychopompos*, there is little evidence that there was an actual operative belief in Mercury as divine escort of a deceased person's soul to the underworld. Hyde (1946: 157–60) acknowledges this oddity in a review of a book on beliefs about the afterlife when he says

it seems odd that [such] a study . . . has no mention of Hermes, Mercury, or the concept of 'psychopomp' which is certainly in evidence in poetic genres, if not in everyday beliefs of the populace on late Republican Rome and thereafter.

(italics added)

Mercury certainly does appear on some sarcophagi with the caduceus and other paraphernalia of the Greek Hermes; however, this need not mean that the occupant of the coffin or the person who commissioned it believed that the god was the leader of souls, especially when the scene depicted is mythological in content (Figure 7.4).



Figure 7.4 'Hermes with children in Elysium', fresco, third century ce, Rome

Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome, Italy; © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY

p.138

The figure of Mercury in association with death in this context need be no more than a visual trope adopted and adapted from the Greeks' iconographic tradition. This is particularly likely when there are no specific references to his veneration as 'leader of souls' and no extant evidence of prayers to Mercury in this capacity. The same may apply to the depiction of Mercury with caduceus in a fresco from a tomb's wall, which suggests that he has guided or delivered youngsters to a place of beauty in the underworld. Further confirmation is gained from Pausanias' apparent need to explain to his auditors/readers that Hermes' status as 'the minister of Zeus and leader of the souls of the departed down to Hades' was granted him by tradition based on the Homeric poems (8.32.4).

There is, in fact, only one place at which Mercury may have been recognised as divine *Psychopompos* by Romans and that is at the site of a temple to Poseidon on Greek soil on a hill at the cape of the peninsula at Tairaron (Taenarum) in the Peloponnese. A nearby cave is reputed to be the one through which Herakles brought up Kerberos from the underworld. In this he was assisted by Hermes, who led the way; when

taken in conjunction with Plutarch's knowledge of it as a location at which the River Styx flowed out from Hades (*De primo fridigo* [*On the Principle of Cold*] 954 F), and as the home to a 'Psychopompeion' (*De sera numinis vindicta* [*On Delays of Divine Vengeance*] 560 F), it would seem that the site had become one where Hermes (and perhaps Mercury) was worshipped. Schumacher (1993: 73–4) suggests that the later installation of a chapel on the site dedicated to 'the bodiless saint' (an appellation for the Archangel Michael), who also bore an association with the escorting of souls, is indicative of Hermes/Mercury's former worship there. There is also evidence of Roman habitation at the nearby town of Taenarum (or Caenepolis) on the peninsula's west coast; but here again, evidence of actual worship of the god in this capacity is lacking. This perhaps explains the Romans' rejection of the Mercury/Anubis synthesis.²⁷

The situation was somewhat different for Thoth. For anyone who regularly used the name 'Hermes' to refer to the Greek god (or 'Mercury' for his Latin worshippers), it would have been normal to assume that someone else speaking of 'Hermes' or 'Mercury' was also referring to the god with which the auditor was familiar. Unless they added the distinguishing epithet 'Trismegistos', the things said about the god would be assumed to apply to Hermes/Mercury. Even then, from certain statements made about the Graeco-Roman and Egyptian god, it seems that some continued to think of their own 'Hermes' or 'Mercury' as one-and-the-same deity as 'Trismegistos'.²⁸

According to Cassius Dio's report (71.8.10), as late as 172 ce confusion remained about which god was being referred to when an Egyptian magus ('magician') named Arnouphis claimed he had charmed 'Hermes of the air' (*ton aerion*) to come and assist in the bringing of rain. Those of an Egyptian background assumed it was their 'Hermes' (aka Thoth) who had intervened, while those of the Graeco-Roman persuasion believed it to be their own Hermes (aka, Mercury). Roman coins were even produced in 172/3 and 173/4 ce commemorating the event with an image of the Graeco-Roman Hermes/Mercury on the reverse. Although 'officially' there was no conflation or confusion among the activities of Thoth, Anubis and Hermes by priests and other semi-professionals, it may be expected that the average person would not be so discriminating.²⁹

OVERVIEW

Roman Mercury is and is not the same god as found in Greece: for the

Romans, his associations with trade and commerce predominated in cult; however, in literature the god retains the vast majority of the prerogatives held by Greek Hermes. It is possible that the existing prerogatives of Etruscan Turms may have had an influence on the number and kind of activities granted Hermes' Roman counterpart, but this is at best conjecture. Similarly, the establishment of a temple for Mercury on the Aventine Hill in 495 BCE invites speculation that he may have been receiving private worship as a mercantile god for some time beforehand by Romans and others, but again, it cannot be stated definitively why the Romans chose not to venerate Mercury for all of the same prerogatives held by Hermes. This is particularly intriguing given Ovid's tale in his *Fasti* linking Mercury with the conception of the Lares while in the process of leading their mother to the underworld.

Despite the disappearance of many of Hermes' privileges, Mercury does acquire one that Hermes did not have: he became the bringer of peace, and this seems to coincide with the advent of Augustus as emperor. So Roman Mercury is and is not Greek Hermes, and this should not surprise. Just as the 'Mercurys' Romans found as they encountered other people groups did not exactly mirror their own god, so Roman Mercury did not exactly mirror Hermes. The same applies to those cultures to which the Greeks brought their Hermes to the east and south of Greece. The receiving culture may recognise aspects of their own deities in Hermes or appropriate some of his honours for their own god. What seems to emerge from the extant evidence is that those to the east were more receptive to Hermes' communicative prerogatives, whereas those to the west (in the eyes of the Romans) valued Mercury's mercantile activities.

NOTES

- 1 On the indigenous Latin gods, see Dowden (1992: 12–13); Dumézil (1996: vol. 1, 3–46 (especially 32–46)). On the equation of one god with another see Rives (2007: 142–4).
- 2 See de Grummond (2006: 39) for Turms and the prophetic; de Grummond (2006: 55–6) for Turms and his images which feature both chthonic and terrestrial/celestial elements; and de Grummond (2006: 76–8) for discussion of the 'judgement' image. For full discussion of the Etruscan mirror in relation to Mercury and the Roman festivals of the dead, see Wiseman (1995); for Etruscan funerals and underworld deities in particular, see Jannot (2000); Krauskopf (2006).
- 3 Unless this is Ovid making play with the various unexpressed connections to be inferred from the underlying sacred narratives. There is an inscription from Spain which seems to give the name Mercurio Competali to the Lares Compitales (*CIL* 2.5810). On the Lares, see Robinson (2011: 370–89); Rives (2007: 119); Murgatroyd (2003: 313); Littlewood (2001: 923–4); Scullard (1981: 117–18); Ogilvie (1969: 101, 104); on the festivals of the Feralia and Lemuria and the Lares and dogs, see Littlewood (2001). On the significance of crossroads in Roman and Greek culture see

- 4 On the background of the name Hermathena and other such combinations, see Kelly (2009); Richardson (1973). Cicero was not required to deliver this speech against Verres because the latter had gone into voluntary exile beforehand.

- 5 If the temple of Mercury erected in Roman Corinth is any example, it would seem that Rome made a point of locating a temple to the god of trade in the business districts of cities they established or conquered. For discussion of Mercury's Temple in Roman Corinth, see Scranton (1951).
- 6 See Ogilvie (1969: 11). On Mercury, commerce and merchant guilds, see Rauh (1993: especially 151–88); Hasenohr (2001) (Delos); Grether (1932) (Pompeii). Ridley (1968: 548) doubts the derivation of Mercury from *merx*; see also Dumézil (1996: vol. 2, 439). On Maia's festival, see (Scullard 1981: 116–17); for the Roman divinity, Maius, see Macrobius (1.23.16); Ovid, *Fasti* (5.110); Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* (13.23.2); on the Lectisternium see Leigh (2002).
- 7 See Lateiner (2001) for some discussion of Mercury in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.
- 8 On Mercury's appeal to a father's obligation, see Eidinow (2003); on Mercury's display of rhetorical skill in this scene, see Murgia (1988); for an allegorical interpretation on the encounter, see Jones (1987); for Virgil's engagement with *Odyssey* 5 in the construction of this scene, see Davidson (1992); Muse (2005).
- 9 On Horace *Odes* 1 generally, see Nisbet and Hubbard (1970); on *Odes* 1.10, Houghton (2007), Lyne (2005), Miller (1993), Cairns (1983), Page (1979: 252–8) and Freis (1971).
- 10 For discussion of Mercury in *Amphitryo*, see Lowe (2009); McDonnell (1986).
- 11 On domestic money-boxes see Kaufman-Heinimann (2007: 197–8). Schnur (1972: 15) notes that in Petronius' *Satyricon* each of Mercury's four appearances are beneficent.
- 12 For discussion of Mercury in Ovid's *Fasti*, see Miller (1993). Harries (1989: 178) implies that Roman Mercury was not duplicitous when he says, '[t]his association is Ovid's', with regard to the combining of mercantile and deceptive elements in the god. In contrast, Littlewood (1975) does see Mercury *Dolios* in the merchant's god. For Mercury's festival, see Scullard (1981: 122); Wiseman (1995).
- 13 On the concept of *kerdios*, see Roisman (1990). The Romans actually had a different deity who oversaw theft and unscrupulous financial negotiations, and she was called Laverna (Horace, *Letters [Epistles]* 1.16.60–1).
- 14 Scott (1928) argues that the Hellenistic connection between Hermes and rulers likely arose with those who saw themselves (and wanted to be seen) as a *Basileus Sôtêr* (King-Saviour).
- 15 On Horace, Mercury and Augustus, see the commentary on *Odes* Book I by Nisbet and Hubbard (1970); see also Elmore (1931); Miller (1991); Phillips (1992: 68); Simpson (2002); Lynne (2005). Wyler (2006) discusses the depiction of Octavian as Mercury in cubiculum E; Spier (1991) discusses the gem. Chittenden (1945: 43) offers a short assessment of the Augustan coin from 29–27 bce; on the name-change of the 'servants' and the subject of their veneration see Grether (1932) and Chittenden (1945: 49–50). See also Zanker's (1988) discussion of images and Augustus.
- 16 On Caligula as Mercury see Ferguson (1994: 258) with references. Henriskén (2012) notes Martial's linking of Domitian with Mercury's favour in his *Epigram* 34. Scott

(1928) argues against the regular association of the emperor with Mercury. See also Zanker's (1988: 11–12) brief discussion of the role of the mint masters in choosing images for coins. On Julian and Hermes, see Greenwood (2014).

- 17 See Saylor (1979) for further discussion of Mercury and Peace. These coins can be viewed at: <http://numismatics.org/ocre/results?q=fulltext%3Amercury>.
- 18 Rives (2011: 172) notes the number of indigenous *epikleises* attached to Mercury's name in Roman Gaul. Wednesday, our own name for this fourth day of the week, is derived from Woden, as in Woden's day. On Woden/Odin, Davidson (1993: 31). For a fuller appreciation of *interpretatio romana* see Ando (2005). An earlier Church Father uses the naming of the mid-week market-day after a pagan god Woden (= Mercury) as a cause to use the day as a fast-day against covetousness (*Strom.* 7.12).
- 19 On Lug, see Crummy (2007: 225); Olmstead (1994: 106–16); Davidson (1993: 29–30); Webster (1986); Buchholz (1984). Maier (1996) challenges the Lug/Mercury association. For the Rosmerta/'Mercury' relief, see Henig, Cleary and Purser (1993); Baratta (2001) offers a focussed study of Mercury in the Iberian Peninsula.

p.141

- 20 J. Webster (1995) examines the power dynamics operative in *interpretatio romana*.
- 21 For the Hermes statues and reliefs at the Temple of Ephesian Artemis, see Willers (1967).
- 22 Langdon (1918) looks at Nebo as *Logos*. According to Strugnelli (1959), there was a Nabatean goddess as well as a North Arabic one (on whom see Milik and Teixidor 1961) who likely paralleled Aphrodite in many respects and who was paired with a male god of the Nebo/Hermes type. See also Stančo (2012: especially 227–35) for discussion of more Iranian and Indian gods identified with Hermes. Elsewhere in the Near East, at Harran, Greek Hermes was being equated to an Arabic figure named Idrīs, because they both shared an affinity with two other divine figures of similar abilities: Israelite Enoch and Dōrēsh ha-Torah (Erder 1990). For the reverse perspective, West (1997) provides a study of the various influences the Near East had on ancient Greece, including the gods. More narrowly, Larson (2005) suggests that the twenty-first-/twentieth-century bce 'praise-poem' about the hero Lugalbanda may inform Hermes' undertaking on the first day of his life in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*.
- 23 On the three Hereses see Burnett (1976) and Fodor (1970: 502–5). For detailed study of the Arabic Hermes see Van Bladel (2009). Griffith (1960) discusses a myth that explained how the gods came to be converted into their respective Egyptian bird or animal.
- 24 On Thoth as god of language, see Volokhine (2004), in relation to Greek Hermes. Hornblower (1943: 28) goes on to comment on the further parallels in the shared functions of Thoth and Hermes with the Christian archangel Michael, who also weighed the souls of the departed before leading them upward to Paradise.
- 25 For brief discussion see Hornblower (1943: 48). On the early reception of Egyptian gods in Greece, see Pollit (1965); on 'popular religion' in Egypt, see Bell (1948). The substitutability of Hermes for Thoth is evidenced in the Greek translation of an Egyptian tale: Thoth simply becomes Hermes according to West (1969).
- 26 Witt (1971: 198–209) and Wolinski (1987) offer discussion of Anubis and Hermes. For the continued use of Hermes as *Psychopompos* in tomb decorations in Alexandrian Egypt, see Venit (1988). The Greeks also had a female deity, named Hekate, who, like

Hermes, had strong chthonic associations and also maintained a close connection with dogs.

- 27 Houghton (2007) more emphatically states what Hyde (1946) had earlier only implied: Mercury never received cult as a guide of souls for the Romans. On the Psychopompeion, see Schumacher (1993: 73–4).
- 28 Matsumoto (2013), however, argues that the association of Roman gods with those of Egypt was typically quite rare.
- 29 Liebeschuetz (1979: 211–18) discusses the so-called ‘rain miracle’; see also Fowden (1987); Isrealowich (2008).



HERMES AFTERWARDS



8

TRANSFORMATIONS I

Other Mercurys

Once Hermes leaves the Greek world, he will not return again as ‘Hermes’ for over a thousand years. The ‘Hermes’ with which the late antique and medieval western worlds will become familiar is a multifaceted combination of the allegorical Hermes, Roman and astrological Mercury, and Egyptian Hermes Trismegistos, reputed author of the technical and philosophical *Hermetica*. The best that one can do in attempting to follow his transformations through these various currents of thought is to highlight the ways in which each of these affected his re-emergence as a Greek god in the Renaissance and thereafter. But to do so requires a brief return to the Roman world where the changes in Hermes’ reception begin.

In the first century BCE, Cicero, in his *De Natura Deorum* (especially 3.56–7, 59–60), provides a sense of just how much things are changing when he has ‘Cotta’ present the Sceptics’ account of Mercury’s genealogy, which openly challenges a belief in the god’s very divinity by stating that there were actually five different Mercurii. According to Cotta, the one known to the Greeks as Hermes was actually the third; the first, as the son of Sky and Day, inspired the Herms. The second, born to Valens and Phoronis, became an underground deity closely linked to Trophonios. After the Mercury born to Zeus and Maia, about whom no comment is made, the fourth was fathered by the Nile in Egypt; however, he remains

nameless as his is a name not to be spoken. Finally, the Mercury who killed Argus is the one who fled to Egypt where he passed on his knowledge of letters and laws to that people by whom he is called Thoth. In this description 'Cotta' makes use of a rationalising explanatory belief about the gods' origins that had appeared earlier in the Hellenistic period.¹

Such an explanation was first put forward by Euhemerus (c. 311–380 BCE), in his adventure tale wherein the hero reportedly found a long-concealed inscription revealing the true nature of the gods. According to this ancient report Ouranos, Kronos and Zeus had lived their lives as mortal men. Nevertheless, because they had performed great feats of strength or ingenuity which had greatly benefited their communities, when they died their communities erected statues of each as a way of honouring them and, over time, they began to be viewed as something more than human and eventually worshipped as 'gods.' This revelation was adopted by the Latin author Ennius to explain the origin of other divine beings and thereafter it became particularly favoured by some philosophical schools. But Euhemerism may itself have been a response to another way of explaining gods which also began with, and remained popular among, certain philosophical schools.²

p.146

ALLEGORICAL HERMES/MERCURY

This earlier way of understanding the gods began with the attempts by late sixth-century BCE natural philosophers to uncover concealed knowledge about the cosmos within the Homeric narratives. These studies proceeded on the assumption that behind each god's name, attributes and activities stood truths about the divine realm and the nature of the world in which they lived. As a result of this thought-work, Hermes' status as divine messenger and his association with motion were translated into an allegorical representation of the Greek word 'logos', a term embracing the semantic senses of 'word' and 'speech' (among others). Theagenes of Rhegium is said to have been the first such philosopher/grammarian to give Hermes the epithet 'logos' in the sixth century BCE (scholiast on *Iliad* 20.67), although others claim that the philosopher Anaxagoras or his student Metrodorus were the first to allegorise the gods (Diogenes Laertes 2.3.11; also *Iliad* 20.67 scholiast).³

A very similar sort of thought-work underlies Sokrates' (tongue-in-cheek?) rehearsal of the origins of Hermes' name in Plato's *Kratylus*

roughly a century later. But here, in addition to Sokrates' identification of Hermes as the creator of the spoken word and its use, he also takes into consideration the fact that words, which signify things both true and false, travel about and circulate: this too is in keeping with the image of Hermes found in the Homeric texts, although in this instance Plato does not have Sokrates articulate the association directly. In this dialogue, Sokrates is searching for the origins of the god's name, based on the meaning of the component parts from which the current word is composed (or derived), and as such it represents an etymologically based interpretation. According to Sokrates, the name 'Hermes' is derived from two verbs, one indicating speech (*eirein*), the other indicating 'contriving' (*hermāsato*), making Hermes, as god, the 'contriver of speech' (408a). In keeping with Plato's etymological exegesis, the Roman Platonist Cornutus (100s ce) would reiterate the view that Hermes was an allegorical figure representing various aspects of thought and speech, but most especially a figure for 'Eloquence'.⁴

Thus, the first-century ce Stoic philosopher and teacher of Nero, L. Anneaus Seneca (the Younger), in explaining why the philosophical school to which he belongs calls their gods by the more typical divine names, Father Liber, Hercules and Mercurius (*On Benefits* 4.8), states that the last-named indicates that aspect of their god which is 'reasoning and numbers, and system, and knowledge' – those very facets of Mercury's honours/offices/abilities which had arisen from earlier allegorical interpretations of him and continued to be rehearsed. But for men such as Seneca the allegorical explanations of Homeric passages dealing with Hermes did not go far enough; they had come to view the god as more than a representative of the spoken word: rather he was 'intellect' and 'reason' itself. Plutarch, too, can inform his auditors and subsequent readers that 'men of old seated Hermes beside Aphrodite, since the pleasures of marriage are particularly in need of "reason"' (*Advice to the Marrying Couple* 138C–D), while [Pseudo]-Plutarch can attribute Odysseus' success in avoiding the shape-altering experience of his companions to Hermes who allegorically represents the reason (*logos*) that allows one to withstand the temptress Circe and retain one's humanity (*De Vita Homerica* 126). Even the fourth-century ce Church Father, Augustine, found the use of Mercury's allegorisation as 'intelligence' useful in his sermons against that self-same god; according to Augustine it is possible for even highly intelligent people to err (*City of God* 62.24) and while intelligence itself is neither good nor bad, it can be directed towards evil ends: thus, to worship images of Mercury is to worship an ambivalent and potentially fallible aspect of humanity.⁵

While these subtle variations in the interpretation of Mercury were being exchanged among the philosophers, they were not all of equal importance to the poets for whom 'Eloquence' held the most appeal. Ovid can refer to Mercury as 'the master of Eloquence' (*Fasti* 5.698) just as Horace himself does in his ode honouring the god (*Odes* 1.10.1-3), where Mercury is credited with 'taming the unruly habits of early mortals by giving them speech'. For some poets, Mercury's association with well-ordered speech implied the presence of a quick intellect, a *nous* ('mind') that intuitively knows the best way to express or accomplish some end. This too Mercury most clearly demonstrated in Ovid's version of the Fourth *Homeric Hymns*: when a distracted Apollo allows his cattle to stroll away, Mercury makes the most of the situation and appropriates them for his own ends (*Metamorphoses* 2.676-86). Whereas Apollo seems to lack the abilities to respond instinctively to a situation in order to fare well, Mercury does not: he instantaneously sees possibilities and the ways to convert them into reality almost simultaneously, representing quickness of mind, eloquence of speech and wisdom in the use of each.

So although in the first century ce Virgil could grant Mercury intuitive rhetorical skills in the *Aeneid* (4.265-75) – especially the ability to persuade – by the second century, the attribution of 'wisdom and eloquence' to Mercury had become commonplace. Philostratos can explain his fable of Hermes' distribution of verbal arts to mortals simply by calling him 'god of wisdom and eloquence, and also of rewards' (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 5.15), linking the goods being handed out with the right to distribute them, a right that had been awarded to Hermes by his father. So, too, in 360 ce the renowned Greek-speaking teacher Libanius in his *Eleventh Oration* in praise of his hometown of Antioch could write (XI, 183-4):

It seems to me that the god, when he divided the earth into two parts, did so with the desire to adorn each part equally and to preserve the balance, as though in a team of horses; so he commanded Hermes to plant the seeds of eloquence which should not be inferior to those in Attica, and with his rod to incite men to the possession of this eloquence.⁶

While poets and orators were content to present Mercury (or Hermes) as Lord of Eloquence, and the allegorists continued to read the god as a cipher for 'eloquence' itself during the second century, between the third and fifth centuries, in the allegorical readings carried out by the Greek and Roman Neoplatonic philosophers, Mercury is granted a greater importance even than 'eloquence'; he gains significance as a determining factor in the fate of souls and the structure of the universe. Their readings, however, were informed by an understanding of the universe gleaned from other schools of knowledge.⁷

Hermes, under his Roman name, is most frequently encountered as an allegorical figure from late antiquity onwards, due primarily to the influence of two Latin texts and the several commentaries written on them in conjunction with the many mythographies and dictionaries produced between the 400s and 1800s ce. An early Roman etymological explanation of Mercury's name put forward by Varro (first century BCE) derives it from the words '*medius currens*' which he said expressed the idea that words 'run between' persons. Centuries later (400s ce) Varro's explanation is repeated alongside those of some others by Servius in his commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid* – the first of the two influential texts. The practice of repetition is also followed in the compendium on mythology by Fulgentius (late 400s to early 500s), and after him by the seventh-century *Origines* by Isidore of Seville, who also availed himself of Augustine's *The City of God* and Servius' *Aeneid* commentary.⁸

p.148

The other influential text on which commentaries were written was *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*, a fifth-century ce tale by Martianus Capella, in which allegorical figures themselves become the lead characters. *De nuptiis* (the abbreviation of its Latin title) was a deliberately constructed and elaborate allegory of the union between 'Eloquence' (Mercury) and 'Learning' (Philology). So highly esteemed is Mercury by his father that Jupiter himself calls his son 'our good faith, our speech, our benevolence, our true Genius, faithful messenger and interpreter of my mind the sacred Nous' and grants him permission to go down to earth to find the bride he desires. Mercury duly descends and, having found her, re-ascends, while she is beautifully attired and raised up to meet him in the heavens (Figure 8.1).



Figure 8.1 'Mercury leading Psyche to Olympus', Federico Maldarelli (1826–93)

Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples, Italy; © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY

Like Psyche in Apuleius' tale, she will be required to drink ambrosia to obtain immortality; however, Philology does not have Mercury for her escort as Psyche does here in Malderelli's scene: Philology had other attendants to carry her to heaven to meet Mercury, her groom, there. As a wedding present, Mercury gives his new wife seven goddesses as her attendants, representing the Seven Liberal Arts: Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric; and Geometry, Arithmetic, Astronomy and Harmony. These seven, divided into a group of three and four, represented, respectively, the trivium and the quadrivium of classical education. The entire piece is an allegorical satire highlighting the inadequacies of 'text-book' learning. Perhaps it is not surprising that this tale would prove to have a significant influence on the future literary and artistic interpretations of Mercury as divine and planetary god.⁹

p.149

Five centuries later, the *Suda*, a tenth-century ce Greek lexicon (dictionary), offers explanations not only for a word's meaning but also for interpretative details. On the name 'Hermes' it tells its consultants that as the son of Zeus and Maia, he is 'mind and sense' because words themselves come from mind and sense. He then relates Hermes' wings to the swiftness of words to explain Homer's expression, 'winged words'. The un-aging quality of words is visually represented by Hermes' youth, while

his quadrangular form is the representation of stability and solidity. Suidas follows this with a simple statement about Hermes' status as patron of commerce and profit-making to explain why he is depicted checking the weight of a money bag (E3037). Elsewhere, he associates the Herm's form with the god's guardianship of reason and truth, an expansion on the stability of the four-square nature of both god and representation (E3051).

Neoplatonic interpretations of Mercury continued into the 1100s in the work of one of the greatest compilers, Eustathius, who explains Hermes' assistance to Odysseus in his escape from Calypso as the *logos* facilitating the soul's movement from embodied to unencumbered (contemplative, philosophic) existence (Eust. 1389, 42–4, 44–50). However, in the same period, Bernardus Silvestris' Commentary on the *Aeneid* retains Mercury as sole representative of eloquence but denies the wisdom granted him in a contemporaneous but anonymous commentary on the same text, known as Peterhouse MS 158. Indeed, Silvestris repudiates Mercury's wisdom because of Martianus Capella's tale, from which he argues that had Mercury truly possessed wisdom, he would not have needed to marry *Philologia* (which he assumes translates as 'wisdom'). While minor quarrels over this or that finer point of Mercury's significance appear from time to time, in the end they matter little in the many new commentaries on the *Aeneid* or Martianus' *De nuptiis* and mythological compendia appearing in the ten centuries between late antiquity and the fifteenth-century Renaissance: 'Mercury' continued to be known primarily as an allegorical figure of eloquent speech and swiftness of thought.¹⁰

In addition to commentaries and mythographies, the literary allegory of the sort employed by Martianus involving Mercury continued to appear from time to time after 500 ce. But it is in the 1300s that Mercury begins to be used in literary works such as plays, poems and narratives of varying lengths. The earliest allegory involving Mercury after Martianus' *De nuptiis* is Dante's *Inferno*, a tale of one man's overcoming of 'vice and temptation' through the art of reason and wisdom represented by Hermes and Athena (respectively). Chaucer, Dante's contemporary, turns the myth of Io, Argus and Mercury into an allegory in which Mercury represents the devil and his music, 'the wanton charms of women,' which overcome his opponent.¹¹

In the fifteenth century, Philippe le Bon, Duke of Burgundy, wrote a political allegory involving Mercury after the Turks had captured Constantinople in 1453. In an appeal to a personified France for assistance from a personified Greece against an unnamed beast (representing the Turks), Mercury appears as the eloquent speaker, representing Mary as the Church's intercessor, who indicates one possible

solution to the problem in the person of Mars. In the next century, George Sandys revisits Odysseus' encounter with Circe and reports that the goddess' sensual charms 'are not to be resisted, but by the divine assistance, Moly, the gifte of Mercury, which signifies temperance', while Budé will recognise the foreshadowing of Christ, the true intermediary between God and man, in Mercury.¹²

p.150

In contrast to these allegorical Mercurys, Shakespeare was content to make use of his more mythological standing as a clever speaker, modelling his Richard on Mercury as deceitful messenger who, in this capacity, remains the agent of the ruler in *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*. Mercury's skilful manipulations of words is openly acknowledged in *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* when a clown named Feste implies that Olivia had been coached to misrepresent the truth by the god (I.v.97-8), while his association with theft is used in *The Winter's Tale*, where Autolycus, Hermes' mythical grandson, inheritor of Hermes' 'light-fingered' skills, is used to effect a playful revision of the relationship between Hermes and Apollo. It is only in *Love's Labour's Lost* that the erudite Mercury of medieval thought appears, set in opposition to Apollo, representing the art of poetry.¹³

Similarly, the allusions to Hermes made by Raleigh and Spenser stay in touch with his traditional talents. In the last line of Raleigh's sonnet celebrating the success of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590s) he characterises his friend as the 'celestieall thiefe', while Spenser himself makes use of Mercury as a messenger and Herald in *Mother Hubberds Tale*, wherein the god's deceptive and thievish habits are also noted. And yet, despite even Marlowe's play with Mercury's traditional amorousness in his pursuit of a milk-maid in his version of the *Hero and Leander* tale, the acknowledgement of his divinity was almost wholly lost behind the allegorical identities that dominate this period.¹⁴

Allegories of Mercury were not limited to the written word but are also to be found in the visual arts. In a set of three paintings by Jacopo Zucchi (c. 1541-90) generally taken to be based on the three ages of man (Gold, Silver and Bronze) articulated by Hesiod, allegorical and symbolic references of the Mercury appear in two, the second and the third. In the 'Silver' age image, a female figure taken to be 'Industria' appears bearing the iconographic attributes of Mercury. According to Puttfarken (1980), this suggests that in the age of silver, one needs the skills of Mercury to survive and prosper. In third picture, however, the viewer sees not a further deterioration, but an improved Age of Justice and Good

Governance, with Ceres (Goddess of Earth and Grains) and Mercury positioned in the upper register alongside Jupiter, Juno and Justice herself. In this image Mercury holds his money bag, indicating the importance of commerce in the realisation of the good life. A similar association of Mercury with a self-motivated drive to better oneself can still be observed in the 1800s in Keats' *Lamia*: in Norris' view (1935), Hermes here represents the poet as seeker of knowledge, who through the help of the senses, represented by Lamia, can obtain the vision of pure beauty represented by the untouched Cretan nymph. Clearly this is not allegory in the strong sense; however, the symbolic use of these figures relies upon the meanings attached to Hermes/Mercury in earlier allegorical works such as Achille Bocchi's emblems.¹⁵

p.151

As Rolet notes (2009: 199–200), after the publication of study of Mercury in Boccaccio's mythographic study, *Genealogiae deorum*, in 1472, which accepted Cicero's 'five Mercurys' are accurate, his humanised form could be used to represent the planet, an orator, a physician, a negotiator and a thief. Thus, another image to emerge from the sixteenth century was of Mercury with his index finger held to his lips, giving visual representation to Cicero's advocacy of a rhetorical use of eloquent silence by which to make one's point. This image first appears as Symbol 64 in the 1555 *Symbolicae Questiones* by Achille Bocchi, a book of emblems with accompanying poems and other commentary. But prior to Bocchi's book the first ever collection of such emblems was that of Andreae Alciati, which appeared in 1531 and contained an emblem of a half-risen Hermes from a pile of stones situated at a crossroads, with the god's caduceus seemingly indicating on which branch of the road one should travel. These allegorical/symbolic images typically appear with a motto beneath each, suggesting what the image indicated. Bocchi also chose to use Hermes alongside Athena as the co-joined symbol of his Academy in Bologna, depicted in emblematic form in his books of emblems: rather than the double form of the Hermathena mentioned by Cicero, Bocchi depicted two figures from the waist up arising from individual Herm bases, each with their appropriate attributes, but side-by-side with arms linked to indicate their inseparability as much as their cooperation in the education provided by the *Academia Bocchiana*. This emblem was converted into a three-dimensional figure which was placed on the corner facade of the school.¹⁶

This continuity in the understanding of Mercury throughout this long period was not derived solely from allegorical readings. Two other realms of knowledge which emerged during the Hellenistic period also exerted

their influence on Hermes'/Mercury's reception by these later generations. The earliest of these, after allegory, was astrology.¹⁷

ASTROLOGICAL MERCURY

Beck (2012: 17) has noted that by at least the eighth century BCE, 'the Greeks had access to precise astronomical records,' but it was the Babylonians who developed mathematically accurate astronomical charting methods: from these the Greeks in Egypt were the first to employ such charts in interpretative astrology. By the first century CE both were understood and practised by specialists in various locations throughout the Roman Empire. For instance, Pliny the Elder, author of *Natural History* (first century CE), is clearly well versed in the 'mathematical' side of astronomy. At several points in this work, he brings in discussion of Mercury, the planet, noting, for example, that Mercury rarely has an evening rising in the sign Pisces, but does so frequently in Virgo; likewise he has morning risings in Libra, and in Aquarius, but seldom in Leo; and he is invisible for thirteen days of the year (2.25). Also, when discussing the colours attributed to each of the planets, Pliny knew that Mercury was called *Stilbôn*, 'Sparkling,' a translation of the Babylonian descriptor given to this planet which was passed down with their astronomical knowledge. Cicero, too, in his own astronomical discussion from the previous century (*Timon* 29) refers to the planet we know to be closest to the sun as 'the star sacred to Mercury'.¹⁸

p.152

From these two authors it emerges that the planet could be referred to either *as* Mercury or as *sacred to* Mercury; in either formulation, the important point was that the planet exhibited all aspects of the god's character and talents. Naming also facilitated the construction of charts based on mathematical astronomy, which permitted the calculation of planetary positioning years in advance. With the ability to predict the position of the planets relative to each other and the fixed stars (constellations) at some future time came the belief that mortals could read the stars to foresee major climatic and environmental events, such as floods or droughts and even the births and deaths of significant human beings, such as kings. Only later did the use of this knowledge come to be applied to the casting of personal horoscopes (that is, 'birth-charts' technically called *genethliology*, from the Greek *genesis* = 'birth').¹⁹

'Birth' charts were drawn to depict the heavens at the moment of an individual's birth, in order to consider the position of each planet within

one of the twelve divisions into which the circumference of the sky had been divided and in its spatial relationship to the positions of the other planets and constellations. One of the reasons why Horace deemed himself to be ‘Mercury’s man’ may have been his knowledge that Mercury was in the ascendant at the time of his birth (*Odes* 2.27.29–30): Mercury, if ascendant in a propitious ‘house’, could be an indicator of financial success. Because each of these stars was believed to be the ‘living’ representative of the god for which it was named (if not the very god itself), it was also believed that each planet would impart the characteristics of the god, both positive and negative (in greater or lesser degrees), according to in which of the twelve divisions (‘signs’ or ‘houses’) of the zodiac a particular planet was located relative to the others at the time of birth – and not only at one’s birth. By way of example, Beck (2012: 40) offers the case of a ‘businessman’ who learns that Mercury is, *at the time of consultation*, in the ‘sign’ of Virgo, which is about to rise shortly. These positionings are then interpreted for him to indicate that he is in the right line of work and is likely to prosper. His astrologer can make this prediction because ‘Mercury is associated with commerce’ and given that ‘Virgo is both the “house” and the “exaltation” of Mercury’ and Mercury is in the ‘second “place”’ in his circuit, which represents ‘the place of “gain” (*lucrum*)’, the stars are favourable to the businessman’s success.²⁰

Mercury’s dispersible attributes, abilities and associations extended beyond those to do with commerce to include mental acuity and verbal skills, a talent for dividing and multiplying, a concern for children and youth and the maintenance of community, an innate skill in creating and constructing things as well as displaying an aptitude for cleverness, trickiness and play. Beyond merely enumerating these things, the second-century ce Greek astrologer, named Vettius Valens, also explained that the quality of these various ‘gifts’ changes based on where Mercury is positioned at any given moment. He illustrated this in a suggested reading for a horoscope involving the star ‘common to both Pegasus and Andromeda [which] rises simultaneously with the 21st degree of Pisces, being of the mixture of both Mars and Mercury, [and] make[s] those [born] thus’ rather hyperactive and shiftily characters, fit for nocturnal activities, and ‘corruptors of youths and maidens, perjurers.’ If this configuration occurs for a nocturnal birth, the prognostication is even worse: such a one would be ‘cruel, regretful, liars, thieves, atheists, without friends, phonies’ as well as prone to several other less-than-desirable attributes and activities.²¹

events, including the births and deaths of significant persons, was enthusiastically taken up by the people groups living around the Mediterranean, even though their forecasts yielded mixed results. As early as the first century ce, the unreliability of certain astrological readings for individual lives was inspiring sarcasm and jokes: in the *Apocolocyntosis* 3, attributed to Seneca the Younger, the Olympian Mercury attempts to persuade one of the Fates to allow the emperor Claudius to die that very day so that the astrologers can be seen to get something right for once; to add insult to injury, Mercury then explains that such folk had been forecasting the emperor's death every month for years! As a Stoic who believed that the gods existed but were too aloof to intervene directly in the lives of men, there is a certain irony in Seneca's choice of Mercury, the very god whom he claimed to represent the faculty of 'reasoning and numbers, and system, and knowledge' in the godhead (*On Benefits* 4.8), to deliver this scathing observation. Nevertheless, the point seems to be that even Mercury (as both god and planet?) is losing patience with the astrologers whose erroneous prognostication may undermine faith in the gods rather than solely in their interpreters.

Astrological associations also played a significant part in an eastern mystery religion which became quite popular in the early Roman Empire: Mithraism. In this comparatively new religion (for westerners, at least) an initiate was encouraged to rise through seven initiatory grades, each represented by a planet. This much can be discerned from the mosaic floor found in a Mithraic sanctuary dated to the third century ce in Ostia. The first stage was overseen by Mercury and was represented by a raven, a cup and a caduceus; in this phase, the soul of the initiate was to learn how to free itself from the avariciousness it picked up in the Sphere of Mercury while descending from the realm of Helios. Its ultimate goal was to rid itself of all the encumbrances accumulated in its descent in order to return from whence it had come: that, at least, is what the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry, following Plato (*Timaeus* 41.d), postulates as the purpose of the seven stages of ascent. The fourth-century ce emperor Julian, as an opponent of Christianity, availed himself of Hermes' mythological associations as well as his allegorical ones in his *Seventh Oration*, wherein the god encounters him at a crossroads and guides him through the stages of initiation in the mysteries of Helios/Mithras, imparting to him the further knowledge that he, Julian, had been chosen by the gods to be a Hermes-like guide to his people and lead them back to the traditional gods (*Oration* 7.231a); this was confirmed by his receipt of the rod of Hermes directly from the god (*Oration* 7.234b). Later, Servius in commenting on the *Aeneid* will report that certain natural philosophers maintain that each of the planets gives a person particular positive and negative qualities; in Mercury's case on the negative side he grants

But prior to Julian's allegorical tale, astrology was the actual subject of literary works far earlier. During Augustus' reign, Manilius composed a didactic poem on the stars with a decidedly political edge; nevertheless, it was the first such poem to be written in the Latin language. Before him, however, in the third century BCE, Aratus became the first to produce a lengthy verse-poem, the *Phaenomena*, in which he described the constellations and their risings and settings; although he does not deal with the planets directly, he does include several tales about constellations related to Mercury. So, in addition to the interpretative insights concerning Hermes (and Mercury) provided by allegorists, the extension of the god's aptitudes, abilities and affects to the wandering planet next closest to earth after the moon served as a second factor influencing the understanding and reception of Mercury over time and across cultures. In fact, as the Roman world became more Christianised, the name Mercury came to be more closely associated with the planet as belief in the old gods continued to wane, although mythological commentaries alongside those on the *Aeneid* kept knowledge of the god alive for those who read them. Thus, even in Martianus' fifth-century CE allegory of *The Marriage of Mercury and Philologia* astrological features of the heavens are cleverly employed as the denizens of heaven are turned into guests at the nuptials: they appear as personified 'decans' and other astral 'ministers' of particular importance in the reading of birth-charts and predictive sky-events. As the fifth century drew to a close, the Graeco-Roman pantheon of gods had become (for most educated persons) a combination of planetary powers and allegorical figures for the physical, spiritual or psychological realities at work in the lives of mortals.

p.154

By the twelfth- and thirteenth-century in England, astrological considerations were being included in diaries of the Saints. But by far the most prolific user of the astrological associations of the planet Mercury in fourteenth-century England, Chaucer also exemplifies the transition which had taken place from Mercury as god to Mercury as planet: it is the planet that has powers and giftings which the Greeks and Romans once attributed to the god. It is also clear that Chaucer presumed that his readers would know and appreciate those mercurial associations in at least five of his poems. In *The Wife of Bath*, understanding the location of Mercury in the wife's birth-chart contributes significantly to the understanding of her character. In his *Troilus and Criseyde*, familiarity with the ordering of the seven spheres as presented in Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* invites the reader to place Troilus' soul in the correct sphere upon

his death, which would be the Sphere of Mercury, based on lines 1826–7:

And forthe he wente, shortly for to tell

Ther as Mercury sorted hym to dwelle.

Chaucer, likewise, relies on his readers' astrological knowledge in his *Merchant's Tale* when he tells them that the sun is in Gemini – that is, Mercury's house – stimulating them to recall the planet's attributes (formerly, the god's) including those of eloquence and deceit as well as his oversight of profitable activities both legal and otherwise; clearly, these would be significant in a poem so titled. But perhaps the clearest and cleverest use of Mercury comes in his *Complaint of Mars*, the plot of which is firmly located in astrological charting. Here Chaucer builds a tale of a lover's deceit on the cosmological reality that when the planet Venus is in Mercury's 'house' (Gemini), Mars is unable to see what she is doing. So while Mars is fretting that Venus will be lonely now that she has left his company, she is being greeted most warmly by the master of the house at which she is arriving. This is clearly an allusion to the tale of Hermes' affair with Aphrodite from which was born the semi-divine Hermaphroditus, a tale which was known to the mythographers who produced the commentaries on which many medieval writers relied for their knowledge of the ancient gods.²³

p.155

Dante, too, makes use of Mercury's astral associations. In his *Divine Comedy: Paradiso* 5 he describes his arrival in company with Beatrice at the Sphere of Mercury, where they are met by the souls of those who were 'seekers of honour' in their earthly life and now shine so brightly that they can hardly be seen. The choice of Mercury for their heavenly destination rests on the observed fact that the planet Mercury itself regularly becomes invisible because of the brightness of another star, the sun. Thus these souls, so desirous of 'shining brightly', get lost in the light of each other.²⁴

Chaucer and Dante are followed in the 1400s by Robert Henryson, who continued the literary interest in astral Mercury. In his poem *Testament of Cresseid* he describes Mercury's appearance as follows:

With buik in hand than come Mercurius,

Richt eloquent and full of rethorie,

With polite termis and delicious,

with pen and ink to report all reddie,

Setting sangis and singand merilie;

His hude was reid, heklit atourir his croun,

Lyke to ane poeit of the auld fassoun.

(II.239–45)

The image is one of the hooded and crowned wordsmith of old, which had become a popular way in which to depict such verbally skilled men in the previous century. But the crowning is also reminiscent of the ancient Greek practice of rewarding a victorious poet with a wreath, whether or not Henryson had any knowledge of that practice at the time. Henryson's tale is actually about a court case in which Mercury serves as court's clerk; however, the court is composed of the divine planets and other heavenly inhabitants who are concerned by a breach in the cosmic order. In another work with the same setting, *Judicio Sol in Conviviis* by Simon of Couvin, Mercury also appears as speaker on behalf of the court, and describes himself as being simultaneously recorder, doctor and lawyer (P 213). In this work, Mercury performs the role of a modern-day 'prosecutor' as he lays out the offences humans have committed before the court, just as does Henryson's Mercury in his *Testament of Cresseid*, and here again cosmic order is at stake.²⁵

MAGICAL MERCURY

In addition to Hermes'/Mercury's planetary powers and affects, the widely Christianised world of late antiquity retained a belief in the existence of spirits and other powers that could be thwarted, enabled and otherwise manipulated by 'magical' means, based on an inherited understanding of the correspondence between cosmic and earthly events, expressed in the maxim 'as above, so below.' It is not surprising, then, to find that Mercury's own powers, inherited from Greek Hermes, could be called into service to effect some desired outcome, either positive or negative. Already in Homer his iconic wand with which he was able to close men's eyes and open them again has a hint of the magical about it. Additionally, the god knows about the magic properties of certain plants, and such knowledge is deemed essential for the success of 'magical' potions and spells. These associations were further enhanced by his invocation in curse tablets as a god who could 'bind' or 'loose' someone's tongue or limbs as requested in late fifth- and fourth-century BCE Athens – or even to 'hold down' in some ominous requests such as that made against a certain Pharnobazos, apparently a false prophet at Oblia in the fifth century BCE. When these are coupled with Hermes' status as the god who can cause a group of people in conversation to suddenly fall silent

(Plutarch, *Concerning Talkativeness* 502.F 2-5) and one who can seemingly make something suddenly appear for a person to 'find', a more developed (and occasionally sinister) association with 'magic' is hardly surprising, nor is the fact that Roman Mercury shares in these associations. But beyond these quasi-magical activities, as Collins (2008: 6) has noted, 'magic is fundamentally a form of communication' and this is perhaps why Hermes/Mercury is the natural god to be associated with activities deemed to be 'magical': he is the divine communicator as well as the divine messenger and the only deity granted permission to enter and leave the underworld at will.²⁶

p.156

There is no question that magic remained linked with Mercury in the Roman world of the second century ce as can be seen in Apuleius of Madaura's *Apologia*, the *Metamorphoses* (better known as *The Golden Ass*) and his discourse on Sokrates (*The Divine Socrates*). In *Apologia* (31), Mercury is described as 'the giver of oracles' among a number of other gods upon whom sorcerers *used to call* when performing their rites. By implication, Apuleius wants his audience to believe that this is no longer the case. He goes on to describe a situation in which a bowl of water reflecting an image of Mercury was being used in a process of divination by a young boy (42), subsequently reporting on the Pythagoreans' belief that only certain types of wood were appropriate for carving Mercury's image: this fact will become part of his explanation for the non-magic qualities of the intricately designed, miniature ebony figure of Mercury that he carries with him (61). Apparently his wife's brother had charged Apuleius with using magic against his sister in order that she agree to marry him and with carrying an image of a skeleton for use in the casting of spells: in response to this last charge, Apuleius directs that the jury be shown the little Mercury in question (63) to prove that there is nothing untoward about it. Although the jury acquitted him, the fact that Mercury (invoked as Hermes) was often associated with erotic binding spells may suggest that the brother of Apuleius' wife had good cause for concern.²⁷

Given that incantations are a particular form of word-magic, there is a certain logic by which the master communicator god is associated with such powerful effects of the spoken word. However, in 'magic' it was not just reciting the correct words of a 'spell' that caused the desired effect; it was using such words to 'charm' and 'entrap' the divine power being called upon so that he, she or they would do one's bidding. But words alone were not always enough. As the incident with Apuleius indicates, magical manipulations were assisted (and even effected) by tangible objects as well and this was an association maintained throughout the

ages: from ancient times and throughout all the periods from late antiquity to the present day, people have used objects (typically called talismans) as ‘charms’ to attract something desired or repel something feared. As Albertus Magnus tells us, ‘among the books of Hermes, there is a Book of *Images of Mercury*, in which there are many treatises, one on the images of Mercury, another on his character, another on rings, and another on seals.’ Clearly, ‘Mercury’s’ influence was deemed worth knowing.²⁸

p.157

There were often gemstones or other materials which could be carved with the appropriate words and/or image to achieve the desired end. As Panofsky (1960: 88) notes,

Precious and semi-precious stones were always credited with medical and magical properties, and the increasing influence of Arabic pseudoscience lent force to the belief that the effectiveness of these properties could be strengthened by engraving mythological or . . . astrological images upon the appropriate gems.

Such talismans could protect or enhance one’s ability in a particular area – not surprisingly, a Mercury talisman, typically of emerald, bestowed eloquence and a head for commerce. ‘Magic’ was understood to work with (and against) the planetary powers to bring about desired effects based upon recognised ‘analogies, correspondences, correlations and “sympathies” between adjacent parts’ in the cosmos (Ward 1988: 74). Thus, a variety of magic signs, seals and (although not initially designed to do so) emblems were available to persons interested in knowing how to get heavenly or underworld powers, such as ‘Mercury’, to do as one desired.²⁹

But for talismans, seals and signs to work it was necessary that the correct substance (bone, wood, stone or metal, etc.) in the correct shape (carved, moulded, cast etc.), and enhanced by the correct additives (herbs, liquids, animal parts, written words, etc.), were assembled in the correct way, at the correct time, in the correct place and, when required, with the correct words spoken over them. In these requirements magic had a good deal in common with alchemy.³⁰

ALCHEMICAL HERMES/MERCURY

Closely related to Hermes’ and Mercury’s association with magic comes yet another ‘quasi-magical’ art with the potential to introduce some

confusion into tracking the god through to modern times. In addition to Hermes'/Mercury's astral, allegorical and magical involvements, the god's Roman name was adopted to identify a very unusual metal, otherwise known as quicksilver; at the same time, depending on the language of the author, either Hermes or Mercury could be used in conjunction with the epithet Trismegistos/us to identify the god who had oversight of the art of metallurgy, which would become known as alchemy, in which the element quicksilver/mercury played an essential role.³¹

Alchemy is the name given to the Egyptian 'science' of metallurgy by the Arabs. It involves the manipulation of chemical reactions between elements and substances to produce especially desirable affects, such as the appearance of gold or silver, and highly prized blue. These techniques became the 'secrets' of the metallurgists which required protection and were thus preserved in a coded language not unlike those found in magic recipes and incantations. Given both metallurgy's importance and its 'magical' qualities, the Egyptian god, as named by the Greeks, Hermes Trismegistos, was deemed the inventor and protector of the art, because both Greek Hermes and Egyptian Thoth were associated with magic and secret knowledge (Figure 8.2).³²



Figure 8.2 Alchemical illustration from *Atalante Fugitive*, Michel Maier, 1618. The winged female lion represents mercury, a volatile substance; it must be balanced by a solid substance, personified by the male, unwinged lion. The combat between the male and female is also a union

Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris, France; Snark / Art Resource, NY

Additionally, like magic, alchemy maintained a concern with the correct materials used in the correct order and in the right proportions. But the key ingredient, the essential element in the alchemical process at every stage, was mercury, to which was attributed many of the characteristics and abilities shared by the planet and the god so named. Without 'Mercury' there is no alchemical process. This is because mercury along with sulphur and salt were believed to be the basic components of all metals, and one of the 'recipes' that would become especially important in the west involved the conversion of base metals into the most precious one – gold.³³

Although the West lost contact with some of this alchemical knowledge by the end of late antiquity, it re-entered the medieval world around the 1100s through the Arabs in texts which also contained medical, astrological and magical 'recipes'; these became known as the 'technical *Hermetica*'. The descriptor is meant to set them apart from another collection of texts also credited to Hermes Trismegistus, known today as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, in which are found seventeen tracts of neoplatonically informed instructions on the purification and preservation of one's soul: these are typically thought of as the 'philosophical' *Hermetica* (Figure 8.3). Apart from one text, called the *Asclepius*, the western world had no knowledge of the *Corpus Hermeticum* until 1460, when it was retrieved from Constantinople and translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino. However, the first text in the corpus translated by Ficino, *Picatrix*, contained both magical and astrological elements in its instructions. Not surprisingly, it found immediate acceptance because of the retention of a belief in the quasi mystical-magical correspondences between heavenly activity and earthly effects, summarised by the phrase 'as above – so below'; thus, the reintroduction of physical alchemy in the 1100s and its spiritualisation in the 1400s found fertile ground in which to take root.³⁴

p.159

Both material and spiritual alchemists proceeded towards their goal with a linear understanding of the process: through a series of causes and effects the object would be transmuted into the final form sought, the Philosopher's Stone, which in the material world would be the purest of metals – gold, and in the spiritual world, the perfected *pneuma/psyche* of the individual alchemist. As this process could not be undertaken without some assistance, in material alchemy that assistance came in the form of Mercurius, the reconciler of opposites, and in the spiritual the Holy Spirit, whose similarities with Mercury had long been noted.³⁵

Nevertheless, the practice of alchemy, or the 'opus' as it was called, was not approved by all as is amusingly evidenced in two works from the early 1600s by Ben Jonson. In 1610 he produced a comedy entitled *The Alchemist* which mocked those who engaged in the opus. This was followed in 1615 with the masque, *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court* (1615), presented in allegorical form with 'Vulcan' as the metalworker attempting to use mercury in his gold-making activities. The spirit of mercury, which is best understood as the divine power animating and endowing the substance with its remarkable properties, rehearses what has been done to him in the apparatuses of the alchemical process:

It is I, that am corroded, and exalted, and sublimed, and reduced, and fetch'd over, and filtered, and wash'd, and wiped; what between their salts and their sulphurs, their oils and their tartars, their brines, and their vinegars . . . My whole life with them hath been an exercise of torture.

This violent transmutation in which 'Mercury' is both agent and object is symbolically represented by these male and female lions entwined in mortal combat: at this stage in the process, Mercury is the dominated, female lion (see [Figure 8.2](#)).

A little later in Jonson's masque Mercury reveals that he fully understands what Vulcan seeks to accomplish and he does not approve:

I know what your aims are, sir, to tear the wings from my head and heels, lute me up in a glass with my own seals, while you might wrest the Caduceus out of my hand, to the adultery and spoil of nature, and make your accesses by it, to her dishonour, more easy.

Jonson himself here makes use of the spirit of M/mercury to entertain and critique simultaneously, but this would not have been mistaken for the ancient god.³⁶



Figure 8.3 Detail of Hermes Trismegistos from marble pavement, 1488, designed by Giovanni de Stefano da Siena

Duomo; Scala / Art Resource, NY

In the 1300s there is no recognition of Greek Hermes as a god, as Roger Bacon's explanation of the two Hermes makes clear:

Atlas in fact . . . was the maternal grandfather of Hermes, the greater Mercury, famous for his skill in the great arts. Because he taught these two men, he was venerated as a god after his death . . . His grandson was Hermes Mercury, who was called Trismegistus to distinguish him from the other Mercury.

(Opus Majus I.54–5)

Similarly, in the 1460s Marsilio Ficino has a rather different genealogy, but still no attributions of divinity; from the *Argumentum* introducing Ficino's translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, he records:

p.161

In that time in which Moses was born flourished Atlas the astrologer, brother of Prometheus the physicist and maternal uncle of the elder Mercury whose nephew was Mercurius Trismegistus.³⁷

From this it is clear that neither Bacon nor Ficino could link the Graeco-Roman god Hermes/Mercurius with the supposed author of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Nor is this surprising: neither Hermes nor Mercury had been taken to be 'actual' gods for centuries. Having been stripped of their divinity in the allegorising of both philosophic and then Christian authors, there were only two referents for Mercury – the planet and the metal. With the reintroduction of the *Hermetica*, there was now a third, the ancient Mercurius (Hermes) Trismegistus, whose uncle (or grandfather) was 'the elder Mercury', the euhemerised mortal equivalent of the earlier Greek divinity.

Thus, in many alchemical texts the metal mercury is very often capitalised, perhaps out of respect for the spirit it was believed to contain which accomplished the work of transformation at each stage in the process. For a modern reader, more familiar with the god of mythic narratives, it can be challenging to remember that when the medieval and Renaissance person saw this name, they would not think first of the god but of the 'invisible power' working in and through the metal. Nevertheless, the metallurgic qualities that received the name 'mercury' were ones shared with the god of ancient Greece and Rome: speed, versatility, transformability, invisibility and craftiness coupled with a willingness to serve. Whether consciously or not, Hermes' status as Zeus' agent seems to have informed the naming of this metal, which, like Hermes to Zeus and the Holy Spirit to God, served as agent in the accomplishment of the master's will.

As a result of allegory, astrology and the Christianisation of the West, it would be accurate to say that after 500 ce, Hermes no longer existed as a god, nor did Mercury: rather the latter was either a poetic device, a metal or a planet representing various attributes and abilities shared by some humans, as well as those that could influence the course of one's life, which extended into the arts of magic and alchemy. Given that Latin had been the ancient language in which the west had first received tales about the god, it was the Mercury of the Roman tales rather than the Greek Hermes with which the centuries prior to the Renaissance were most familiar. All the streams of thought from allegory to alchemy to astrology to magic became mixed and blended together to form a complex but comparably stable picture of the god. He remained throughout late antiquity and the medieval period a figure of speech, the master of eloquence and even its embodiment, but these could be positively or negatively presented. Nevertheless, as is most appropriate for a god who was so closely associated with movement and change, Hermes found himself being moved and changed as he passed through different countries and time periods. But it is important to bear in mind that references to Mercury in the literature from late antiquity into the 1800s are either to what the name stands for (primarily planetary attributes) or post-1400s to the Egyptian Trismegistus, grandson or nephew of Hermes.

p.162

NOTES

- 1 Hermes was not the only god subjected to allegorical explanations, nor was he the only god to be transformed into the planet bearing his name, but he was the only Greek male god to be conflated with an Egyptian deity as well as the only one to share his name with a metal outside the context of alchemy: Saturn, Mars and Venus could be used as names in the alchemical process, but they were not code-names for metals in their own right. A discussion of Mercury in alchemy follows after Mercury in astrology.
- 2 By the early fourth century ce, the Christian Lactantius could confidently assert that none of the ancient gods were actually gods; rather, they were no more than men who had risen to political prominence (*Institutes* I.8). Cooke (1927) offers an overview of Euhemerus and Euhemerism.
- 3 Debate continues over the motivating factors behind the allegorical readings of Homer; see, for instance, Long (1992) who refutes the 'defence of Homer' argument for the allegorical reading of the gods in Homer, as well as Richardson (1992) and Lamberton (1986).
- 4 The description of allegory presented here is far narrower than the evidence we have for its practice. The initial term for this form of interpretation, '*hyponoia*' or 'under-thought', implies that something of significance lies beneath the surface meaning of a word. Whitman (1987: 104–21) provides an overview of ancient allegorical practice. Laird (2003: 154–5) views allegory in epic as something "built in" rather than "read

into 'epic' narrative. On Plato and allegory see Tate (1929a); on Cornutus, see Tate (1929b) and Most (1989). Kirkland (2007) offers a discussion of Sokrates' etymology of Hermes in *Kratylus*. In modern discussion of etymology the identification of 'roots' or 'stems' encourages the idea of derivation in contra-distinction to composition.

- 5 The Stoics did not consider the traditional gods to be separate, individualised entities, but rather identifiable manifestations of aspects of a single deity. On Pseudo-Plutarch, see Lamberton (1986: 141).
- 6 On Virgil's rhetorical Mercury see Murgia (1988). Both Littlewood (2001) and Miller (1991) provide discussion on Mercury's eloquence in the poets. Hellenistic and later authors writing in Greek refer to the god as Hermes and the planet by the Greek equivalent of the Babylonian 'Šilbōn', while Latin authors refer to both as Mercury. The distinction has been maintained in the present discussion.
- 7 These other influences are addressed under astrology and alchemy below. Pépin (1958: 104) recognised in the remains of the Homeric allegorists three forms: 'physical, seen in the gods and heroes as representations of the universe; psychological in their dispositions; and, moral in their figuring of virtues and vices.' For shifts in Neoplatonist allegorical work, see Lamberton (1992a: xx). Platonist and Neoplatonists seem to have preferred the psychological – that is, interpretations having to do with the soul (*psychē*) – whereas the Stoics preferred the physical and to a lesser degree the moral.
- 8 The most popular allegorical mythographies were those of Fulgentius' *Mitologiarum libri tres* (400s), Isidore of Seville's *De diis gentium* in his mythological encyclopaedia, *Etymologiae* (500s); Albericus' *Mythographus tertius* (1100s) and Pierre Bersuire's *De formis figurisque deorum* (1300s). Additionally there were commentaries on Ovid, such as Bersuire's *Metamorphosis Ovidiana Moraliter* (1300s), among others. Hexter (1987) provides a comparative study of several of the Ovid commentaries. Varro seems to be trying to find Latin words that could be explained in terms of earlier allegorical findings in Greek; in this instance, Sokrates' observation on the way in which words circulate (Plato, *Kratylus* 408c) may be informing Varro's explanation. For Fulgentius' sources, see Baldwin (1988). For Isidore of Seville, see MacFarlane (1980).
- 9 Book II translations: W.H. Stahl and R. Johnson, with E. Burge (1977) *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts, vol. II: The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, New York. On Capella's allegory, see Relihan (1993); Stahl (1965). Commentaries on Martianus' *Marriage of Mercury and Philology* include those by John Scot (or Scottus, 800s) and Remigius of Auxerre (1000s). Herren (2012) offers an insightful study of John Scottus and his work. Interestingly, apart from the small illustrations (called 'miniatures') accompanying Martianus' text, neither Philology's apotheosis nor her marriage to Mercury were taken up as subjects for either interior decoration (i.e., frescoes and murals) or canvases, although there are many visual representations of the seven liberal arts.

- 10 Wilkins (1957) surveys the descriptions of several deities, including Mercury, in authors from the 1300s. For the Prometheus/Mercury tale, see Starnes and Talbert (1955: 155–6). On Silvestris see Jones (1989). On the Peterhouse manuscript see Baswell (1985). Panofsky (1960: 75) notes that commentaries on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* became influential only in the 1100s.

- 11 For Dante's allegorisation of Mercury in the *Inferno* see Thompson (1967: 41); Franke (1994). For discussion of Chaucer's and Marlowe's Mercury, see Bush (1963).
- 12 Seznec (1995: 80–1) identifies Florence as the fifteenth century's home of allegorical principles. As Devereaux (2005: 309) indicates, in the end only Philippe le Bon, the '*puissant lyon*', can destroy the beast. For Sandys' Mercury, see Bush (1963). For Budé's observation see Silver (1971: 381).
- 13 For *Richard the Third* and *Twelfth Night* see Butler (2002); for *Love's Labour's Lost*, see Evans (1975); for *The Winter's Tale*, Holland (1970); Ingram (2012). Ben Jonson's allegorical Mercury will be addressed in the discussion on alchemy.
- 14 For comments on Raleigh and Spenser, see Bednarz (1996). For the continuity of seventeenth-century allegoresis with earlier practices, see Cinquemani (1970). Ben Jonson's allegorical Mercury will be addressed in the discussion on alchemy.
- 15 On more of Bocchi's Mercury emblems see Rolet (2009) and Watson (1993); on Keat's *Lamia* see Stevenson (1972) and Steward (1976).
- 16 See Bowen (1985: 33, image d, with discussion on 228–9). For further details see discussions in Waddington (1970), Watson (1993: 13–16), Kelly (2009: 64–5) and Rolet (2009: 205–9). According to Warburg (1999: 593–6), emblems of the planets began to make an appearance in almanac in the early 1500s.
- 17 For a large (but not comprehensive) listing of artistic works in which Hermes (Mercury) plays some part, see Reid (1993, *sv* Hermes).
- 18 Volk (2009: 15), contrary to Beck (2012), states that there was no actual distinction between 'astronomy' and 'astrology' as practised by the Greeks and Romans. For Mercury in Pliny, see also *Natural History* (2.21, 23, 24).
- 19 For the Babylonians 'Nebo' was the planet identified as '*Stilbōn*' by the Greeks and 'Mercury' by the Romans; see Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl (1964: 136).
- 20 Vitruvius is also one of the earliest authors to state that both Mercury and Venus travel around the sun rather than the earth, as was generally believed; however, it would take centuries for that truth to be generally accepted. Vitruvius (9.8) also notes that Mercury typically spends thirty days in each sign. A planet in 'exaltation' means it is at its most favourable; in depression, at its least favourable.
- 21 Beck (2012: 76) provides a more exhaustive list preserved from the *Anthologies*, a work by Vettius Valens from 152–62 ce. Valens gives no fewer than forty-six skills and activities over which Mercury has dispensational authority. Pingree (2001: 29) offers a discussion of a fourth-century astrologer's chart, and demonstrates the changes wrought through time and languages by comparing this 379 ce version to those of later translations in Greek, Latin and Arabic (28–35). For a fuller description of all the elements involved in 'casting' a horoscope, see Beck (2012).
- 22 For Mercury in Mithraism see Beck (1988, 2006) and Bobar (1946); however, as early as the first century BCE, some were seeing Hermes, Helios and Mithras as one and the same god: Lincoln (1982). Athanassiadi (1992: 174), Smith (1995) and Greenwood (2014) offer comments on Julian and Mercury. There is also a possible association between Mithras' two attendants, referred to by Julian in his *Hymn to King Helios* as Cautes and Cautopates (or Monimus and Azizos), with Hermes and Ares respectively. For discussion see Strugnell (1959: 36–7); Athanassiadi (1977: 361); Smith (1995: 157); van de Sluijs (2009: 169–70). Barton (1994: 80) notes the astrological aspects of Martianus' *De nuptiis*.

- 23 On the blending of saints' lives with astrology, see Heather (1943). On the *Wife of Bath* see Hamlin (1974); on *Troilus and Criseyde*, see Scott (1956); however, following a Platonic account of the soul's return, Bloomfield (1958) prefers to see Troilus being led by Mercury to the eighth sphere, called the *ogdoad*, located beyond the planetary spheres. For discussion of *Complaint of Mars* see Stillwell (1956), Smyser (1970) and Laird (1972); Vitruvius had noted earlier that Mercury spent a maximum of thirty days in each 'house' and Pliny already (*Nat.* 2.25) knew that the signs in which Mercury was most and least likely to rise. Chaucer also makes use of Mercury in *The Parliament of Fowls* by setting part of the action on Valentine's Day in his temple in a garden, on which see Rothchild (1984) and Chance (1990).
- 24 Dante explains that these folks did good works while alive but were wrongly (selfishly) motivated because they were glory-seekers. See Ciardi (1965) for a more detailed study of the 'sphere of Mercury'. On celestial journeys in medieval literature, see Ege (2000: especially 258, 268–9); on celestial voyages in 1500s French literature, see Ridgely (1963).
- 25 Bawcutt (1981) discusses the significance of Mercury's description in *Testament of Cresseid*; Friedman (1985) provides a comparison of Henryson's tale with that of Simon of Couvin; see also Stearns (1944).
- 26 The larger discussion on the appropriateness of continuing to use the ill-defined term 'magic' is acknowledged but not explored here. On this discussion, see Dickie (2010). On ancient Greek and Roman magic generally, see Dickie (2010), Collins (2008), Ogden (2008) and Graf (1999); on curse tablet and spells see Gager (1992), Faraone (1991) and (on Pharnobazos) Lebedev (1996). Isidore of Seville associates Mercury particularly with the magic of necromancy; see Klingshirn (2003); on Graeco-Roman necromantic beliefs and practices, see Headlam (1902); Dickie (2010); Ogden (2001, 2008).
- 27 See Mortley (1972), Nelson (2001) and Too (1996) for discussion of Mercury in this work; for Mercury aka Hermes in love-magic, see Björklund (2015).
- 28 Cited in Garin (1983: 40). As Ward (1980: 100) notes, 'belief in the spiritual or magical properties of gems is the most stable and uncontested aspect of medieval occultism', and in the subsequent periods as well. For magic's 'revival' in the 900s ce, see Speirs (2006).
- 29 On the re-emergence of astrological images, see Saxl (1970). For the importance of talismans see Kahane and Pietrangeli (1966); of magic seals, Nowotny (1949) and Roos (2008); of emblems, Page (2006) and Weill-Parot (2006).
- 30 For translations of 'recipes' for Greek magical spells from Egypt, see Betz (1986).
- 31 Latin writers would use Mercurius Trismegistus, rather than Hermes, to introduce the figure and often drop the epithet thereafter. The epithet itself may have been based on a misinterpretation of Thoth's place in Egyptian genealogy, as the third in a line of Hermeses, or it may have derived from the number of the branches of knowledge over which he presided; more commonly, however, it is thought to be based on the fact that Thoth held three leadership positions simultaneously, that of priest, philosopher and king. According to Valvo (1978), Manilius employs the epithets Kyllenian and Psychopomp of Hermes/Mercury in his astrological treatise to identify the figure who first brought knowledge of the stars and thus enlightenment to mortals, rather than naming Hermes Trismegistos directly, quite possibly because in the minds of many the distinction between the two was not strongly maintained: however, in van Bladel's view (2009: 4) the name 'Hermes' plus 'Trismegistos' was used to distinguish the Egyptian god from the Greek Hermes.

- 32 For Aristotle's metallurgic theory, see Eichholz (1949). Both the Egyptians' metallurgical knowledge and the later alchemists' attempts to make pure gold from baser metals made significant contributions to the science of chemistry as understood today. See Thompson (2002), Holmyard (1957), Taylor (1951), Hopkins (1934).
- 33 Hopkins (1934) suggests that the technical *Hermetica* were considered 'secret' texts by metallurgists who sought to preserve the 'secrets' of their trade, including how to create the highly desired colour blue and especially the appearance of gold on (and with) baser metals.
- 34 The majority of the 'technical' *Hermetica* have not survived. Both the technical and the philosophical Hermetic texts claimed Hermes Trismegistos as their author; however, Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614) proved that the texts were originally written in Hellenistic Greek of the second and third centuries ce. See Grafton (1983) for discussion. On the *Corpus Hermeticum* see Copenhaver (1992); on its reception, see Yates (2002 [1964]); Seznec (1995). For Ficino and alchemy, see Clark (1983).
- 35 On spiritual alchemy, see Voss (1998). One may gain a sense of how central Mercury's powers were in occult Renaissance thought by reading Cavallaro's (2006) discussion of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*.
- 36 For Chaucer's engagement with alchemy, see Fleay (1879). Duncan (1942), Cunningham (1955) and Flachmann (1977) offer discussions of Jonson's alchemy entertainments.
- 37 As quoted in Yates (2002: 15).



9

TRANSFORMATIONS II

From high to popular culture

Hermes/Mercury has always held a particular attraction in popular culture: from his earlier artistic representations on Greek pots and his 'stage appearances' in tragedy and comedy in fifth-century BCE Athens, right through to modern times, he makes appearances in art, music, prose and poetry, and as forms of communication change and multiply, he retains his appeal to theorists, advertisers and even the aerospace industry throughout the western world, even reaching into those cultures to whom he is a foreigner.

VISUALISING HERMES

Although depictions of all the gods ceased between the 500s and 900s ce, with their reintroduction towards the end of that century from Byzantium, the west was also reintroduced to more accurate images of the god from classical times. Hermes/Mercury did make rather frequent appearances in the art of the Renaissance and in the following centuries, right up until the present, typically retaining the physical attributes that had been granted him in the mythographies, commentaries and dictionaries from the preceding centuries. However, under the influence of the images that accompanied the astrological and other texts obtained from the Arabs, Hermes/Mercury temporarily took on a very foreign appearance. Looking

much like the figure of Hermes Trismegistus himself, as he appeared in the 1488 floor mosaic, the celestial Mercury was given the garb of a scholar, his iconic caduceus replaced by a book, indicative of his mastery of language and learning. In astrological manuals, he would be depicted in this manner seated in a chariot flying over his 'children'; that is, those persons and positions over which he held sway, as can be seen in [Figure 9.1](#).

All the figures busily working away below represent members of the legal, ecclesiastical and educational professions, as well as those involved in various creative pursuits. This is in keeping with the manner of painters and sculptors from the 1400s and 1500s, who typically dressed such figures in contemporary clothing styles. Thus, in an illumination from a manuscript in the Copenhagen Royal Library (Thottske slg, 399) of around 1480, Mercury is clothed in contemporary dress but holding a flute to his lips with his left hand and carrying in his right a modestly curved sword and staff, which rather than entwined snakes carried two miniature winged dragons winding their way to the top. On the left of Mercury stands a rooster, and on the right the figure of Argus whose eyes have been closed by Mercury's tuneful playing.¹



Figure 9.1 Mercury (planet) with attributes, 1531 ce emblem

HIP / Art Resource, NY

These are simple extrapolations from the long history of his supposed

intellectual giftings; other more jarring depictions emerge from a misunderstanding of earlier descriptions of his physical attributes. These include the ever-enlarging caduceus, upon which the neatly styled figure eight of the entwined snakes becomes the three and four-looped winged dragons. Mercury's hat also changes from the leather traveller's cap, the *petasus*, to a winged metal helmet, which only on occasion returns to a less military-looking design. His winged sandals also go through several changes, with one of the more extreme being their conversion to open-toed knee-high boots with spikey-looking protrusions on either side from ankle to knee, meant to represent feathers: Mantegna's 1497 painting entitled *The Parnassus* provides an excellent example of this development. He was, however, far more restrained when, in 1519, he produced an image of Mercury based on the anonymously published engravings of the Tarocchi (Tarot) cards that were published between 1465 and 1475: here the knee-high boots remain, but they carry far more discreet bird-sized wings tied to his ankles. His caduceus, however, has now become the bearer of two crested and winged serpents, with lower bodies tightly coiled near the top of the wand and the necks of their large torsos completing a final twist so that they faced each other in a rather hostile pose. Three centuries later, a more sophisticated way to link Mercury with the occupations and giftings he oversees is presented by Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1766) in his depiction of a statue of the god set in among representative items related to his so-called 'children' in the context of a library or study ([Figure 9.2](#)).²



Figure 9.2 'The attributes of the arts and their rewards', Jean-Baptiste Chardin, 1766. Painted for the sculptor Pigalle, whose statue 'Mercure' is in the centre of the painting

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis Minnesota; Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

One of the most popular scenes in art from the fourteenth century through to the nineteenth was that of Hermes lulling Argus to sleep before killing him. The characters are typically easy to identify because Mercury will have his caduceus, *petasus* and occasionally wings, while Argus will be an unattractive male who is sleeping. In the background there will be a cow, representing the transformed Io. Second in popularity to this mythic scene is that of Mercury's visit to Herse, wherein attempts are made with varying degrees of success to show Aglauros' conversion to stone. Seemingly (and perhaps surprisingly) less frequent is the depiction of Mercury descending to share Jupiter's message to Aeneas in a dream, based on Virgil's *Aeneid* 4. Nevertheless, in the 1700s, Giambattista Tiepolo was moved to paint this scene ([Figure 9.3](#)), in which he has Mercury descending from a rolling cloud with a most elaborate caduceus in his left hand and approaching Aeneas, who lies stretched out on his back across a rock protected by a rocky outcrop over which Mercury is arriving. Indeed, no less renowned a painter than Peter Paul Rubens undertook to paint this scene as well.

Tiepolo's painting stands in stark contrast to an earlier attempt to depict Mercury's arrival to stir Aeneas to action, taking a few liberties with the text. In this version of the event by Daniele de Volterra in 1555, the viewers are treated to a rather unexpected scene, as they find themselves gazing into Dido's bedroom with Aeneas in a partial state of undress and the queen already in bed. Mercury appears above the bed, and rather humorously appears as though he has lost his balance and is in the process of falling from the rafter from which the bed's canopy is suspended; with his feet well above his head, the rather contorted positions of parts of his body also contribute to the humorous effect.³



Figure 9.3 'Mercury urging Aeneas to depart', Giambattista Tiepolo (1696–1770)

Villa Valmarana, Vicenza, Italy; Scala / Art Resource, NY

As beautiful as this scene is, no image of Mercury has attracted as much scholarly discussion as that of Botticelli's *Primavera*. From the viewer's perspective, Mercury stands at the far left of the painting with his back turned to the rest of the scene's divine participants. This positioning, his

posture and its significances are the focus of debates. Because this was a piece commissioned for his patron's son, Gombrich (1945) prefers an interpretation more in keeping with that set forward by Count Plunkett, where Mercury's gesturing with his sword indicates the direction in which one must look for the truth: heavenward. The one for whom his gesture is intended is the young Lorenzo, the designated recipient of the painting. To address the problem of Mercury, Gombrich calls upon the Latin poet Apuleius and his treatment of the performance of the Judgement of Paris as seen by the author in his tale.⁴

It is also interesting to note the choice of scenes involving Hermes/Mercury for adornments of cassone (wedding chests), which were typically given as bridal gifts. Of the ten scenes from Books Ten, Eleven and Twelve depicted on the front panel of a cassone painted by Apollonio de Giovanni, entitled *The Adventures of Ulysses (Odysseus)* from the 1400s, the first shows Mercury warning Ulysses about Circe and offering him the *moly*: this appears in the lower register just to the right of centre, after which comes a group of swine indicating the transformation of Ulysses' crew. On the second of the two long cassone panels, drawn from seven books of the tale, Mercury is shown in the upper register appearing to Calypso, which is followed by an image of Ulysses building his raft. Mercury also makes an appearance on another cassone panel which offers a more compressed version of Ulysses' adventure. Compare this with the absence of the god on another cassone decorated with scenes from the Judgement of Paris: in two scenes where we would expect to see the god, he is omitted. Given his divine intervention to save Ulysses from the wiles of females in the first cassone and his omission from the tale where he traditionally serves as an enabler to infidelity, there seems to be a deliberate effort to use the god in ways that encourage the marital fidelity of the new bride.⁵

COMICS AND ANIMATION

While frescoed ceilings and masterworks in oil or watercolour may not dominate our aesthetic tastes to today, that does not mean that Hermes is absent from the visual arts. Hermes (typically called Mercury) actually has quite a history in comic books, especially in those originally put out by DC and Marvel comics. First appearing under his Roman name in the Marvel range of the 1940s, the god was sent to retrieve Venus (Aphrodite) from earth along with her mortal lover, where the two were put on trial. He subsequently appeared in three further issues in the 1950s when Venus again was involved with mortal men. As might be expected, Marvel's Hermes is the fastest of the Olympians and also endowed with creativity and craftiness; however, he only rates a five out of ten in other areas, such

as strength, fighting skills (especially hand-to-hand combat), durability and, rather surprisingly, intelligence. One suspects that the idea of being Zeus' spokesperson and 'fixer' works to rob him of his own intellectual abilities in the modern mind! More recently, appearing under his Greek name, Hermes has made thirty-eight appearances with the surname (epithet) *Diaktoros* in the newer series *Earth-616*. He also appears some ninety-five times in the pages of comics produced by DC Comics, including three issues of DC's *Wonder Woman* (vols. 2, 51, 59, 132) and of *War of the Gods* (vols. 1, 4; vols. 2, 5). DC Comics also took advantage of Hermes' Roman name and that name's association with the element mercury in the creation of the character so named: 'Mercury' in the series *Metal Men* is a robot made from liquid metal with the ability to maintain the appearance of solid form. Perhaps because elemental mercury was used in old-fashioned thermometers to measure heat because it expands quickly as the temperature rises, the creators of *Metal Men's* Mercury, Robert Kanigher and Ross Andru, made this a figure who 'loses his cool' quite easily.

p.171

Hermes is no stranger to political cartooning either: in an artistic satirical commentary by B. Partridge drawn for *Punch* (194 [1938] 687), the Director of the BBC, Sir John Reith, is humorously depicted as Mercury. With aeroplane wings sprouting from his head and ankles, his caduceus, represented by a microphone cast aside and his money bag replaced by a briefcase, the near-naked ex-director flies away from his job at the BBC to his new position as chairman of Imperial Airways. This political cartoon appeared the year after the planet Mercury had made a visible transit across the sun, perhaps taking advantage of the renewed interest in Mercury that such transits often generate.⁶

Just as the comics could not ignore this multifaceted Greek god, the Disney Studios were unable to leave him out of their 1997 full-length animated movie, *Hercules*. Looking somewhat like a denuded and happier version of the animated Grinch apart from the fact that he wears glasses, Disney's Hermes retains his standing as divine messenger among the Olympians and is also recognised as god of travellers; although, in an ironic twist, his caduceus here looks more like the emblem of Asclepius than his own. The animators have also given him the style of winged cap that became popular much later in the god's history. He first appears in the movie at a baby shower for Hercules, and his comments to Zeus indicate that he is quite the connoisseur of such festivities, playing on the god's infamous desire for food! As Hercules matures, Hermes happens to see the Titans preparing to mount an attack on Olympus and warns his

Olympian family in time for them to ready themselves for battle. Being the last of the gods to be captured, he still suffers under the harassment of the personified deities, Pain and Panic, against whom he uses his caduceus like a cudgel following his rescue by Hercules. Then as the tale nears its end with the welcoming of Hercules among the Olympian family, Hermes directs the divine choral group, the Muses, to sing a song in the new god's honour.⁷

Hermes is no stranger to animated films outside of the English-speaking market either. In Japan, his very versatility makes him the ancient Greek god of choice to represent the second earthly manifestation of the divine leader of a religious movement known as Kôfuko no Kagaku (initially translated as 'The Science of Happiness' but now simply as 'Happy Science'), whose current earthly leader, Ôkawa Ryûtô, is the third (or so the animated tale, *Hermes: Winds of Love*, suggests). In this promotional animated film, when the first god is petitioned for salvation by the people of Crete, Hermes is sent down to earth as a golden feather and this feather turns out to be an incarnation of the first god, the one who sent it, Ophealis. Blending a number of classical figures and tales into a larger story of the struggle against evil, Hermes eventually comes to the realisation that he and his creator are one, and with this he is taken from this life with the aid of divine assistants (angels). The story does not end there; rather, at its end that same golden feather is shown floating down from heaven to the island of Japan, the land of the film's creator, Ôkawa Ryûtô, who also happens to be the leader of the movement for which this movie was produced. The inference is clear; he is the next incarnation of the true divinity behind the others, El Candare. In the mythology of the movement, Hermes appears to be the second most important manifestation to El Candare, the divinity who rules from the ninth-dimensional spirit realm governing planet earth. In this animated movie Hermes represents two of the four fundamental principles of happiness promulgated by the movement: love and progress (or development).⁸

p.172

Hermes (Herumesu), voiced by Benjamin McLaughlin in its English version, is also a major figure in several episodes of a Japanese anime television show based on young adult novels and manga. In both *DanMachi* and *Sword Oratoria*, Hermes is the god who heads the Hermes Familia, whose family home is named 'Travellers' Inn.' All members of this family are profit-seekers but they also assist The Guild in tracking down Black Marketeers. Clearly informed by Hermes' Greek mythology, the family's emblem is a cap with a single feather set against a background of stylised wings on either side. In another playful anime series from Japan, a

‘rock’ group named the *Sekkou Boys* (‘The Rockies’) is composed of four busts of famous figures from the past, of which Hermes is one. One of the problems is turning these ‘rockers’ into ‘idols’! But certainly in one of Hermes’ more unusual manifestations, he becomes not a ‘rock star’ but the name of a motorcycle in a Japanese novel series, *Kino’s Journey: The Beautiful World*, written by Keiichi Sigsawa, with illustrations by Kouhaka Kurobushi. The Hermes bike, although based on the design of a Brough Superior motorcycle, is no ordinary motorbike; rather he is a talking motorcycle with extraordinary speed who serves as Kino’s travel companion and mode of transport as she journeys through a series of foreign lands and peoples. Several anime television adaptations of the tale have been made, as well as two half-hour shorts, the first of which shows Kino developing her skill in riding Hermes. Clearly here it is Hermes’ reputation as protector of travellers and god of speed, and perhaps even his standing as the god of communication, that informs the naming of this precocious motorbike.⁹

Hermes, the talking motorcycle, is not only to be seen in print and anime; he also appears in two video adventure games released for PlayStation 2 between 2003 and 2007 for Kino’s Japanese fans. Hermes also appears, not surprisingly, as a god in a number of English-language video games which either take place in or are based on material from ancient Greece and Rome, especially mythological tales, such as the games *Ulysses and the Golden Fleece* and *Perseus and Andromeda*. In these two games the player must find and then exchange objects with other characters to gain rewards or other tools which may assist them in reaching the next level. In the latter game, once the initial set of basic exchanges has been completed, the player is set the task of gaining a set of winged sandals from a Hermes statue. The same gift of speed is given by Hermes to a player in the game *Rise of the Argonauts*. The god’s role in this game is described by a designer:

p.173

Hermes, the god of swiftness, will reward Jason with increased quickness and agility in battle. His weapon of choice is the sword, so dedicating deeds to Hermes will provide the player with quicker and faster-paced combat. He is also the god of cunning, and is very manipulative, so Jason can win back the hearts and minds of his fellow Iolcans by gaining an intellectual edge over them.¹⁰

Rather more complex is both Hermes’ role and favours in another battle game, *The Age of Mythology*. Each god oversees a particular kind of fighting force, which also represents a particular type of advantage for the player. Each of the players is presented with four sets of three gods from

which only one god can be selected from each set: Hermes appears in the second set, overseeing the cavalry, which stands for speed and motion, and comes with the ability to see things going on in distant places on the game's map. In addition, Hermes provides the player (or more accurately, the unit he controls) with tactical skills which are often crucial in winning a contest. So choosing Hermes gives the player's men a 'bonus' benefit of speed; additionally, drawing upon his mythological status as official Herald and thus patron of earthly Heralds, especially in their treaty- and truce-making roles, Hermes also grants the player the ability to declare a truce and refresh and reorganise his fighters.

Despite the fact that in Greek mythology the Olympian gods are immortal, in PlayStation 3's *God of War III*, that is not the case: in this game it is possible to kill off a few gods, including the speedster, Hermes, in graphically violent ways. In one scenario, a Spartan, who is fixed on destroying the god, is taunted by Hermes for his relative slowness as he toys with warriors in a game of 'catch me if you can.' But Hermes does need to be careful: although he has great speed and the ability to heal wounds quickly, he is unable to regenerate new body parts; the loss of a limb has the potential to be disastrous for the god, and in this game it proves fatal.

STAGE AND SCREEN

In addition to video games, Hermes has not been absent from made-for-TV movies either. In the 1997 Hallmark version of the *Odyssey*, Freddy Douglas played the god as he flew in to greet Odysseus and to show him the plant (*moly*) that would protect him from the potions of Kirke. He also appeared in an episode of the *Justice League Unlimited* (voiced by Jason Bateman) when he came with instructions to Wonder Woman that she was to assist Hades in his conflict with Felix Faust. In the United Kingdom, a cinematic version of Tony Harrison's stage play, *Prometheus* (loosely based on the fifth-century BCE Greek tragedy by Aischylos, *Prometheus Bound*), aired on Channel 4 in 1998. In Hall's (2002) view,

The film . . . offers the most important adaptation of classical myth for a radical political purpose for years, and (with the possible exception of his stage play *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*) the most brilliant artwork Tony Harrison has yet produced.

In both the original and Harrison's revision, Hermes plays a most unsympathetic character, fulfilling his role as the superior power's spokesperson with detached proficiency and not a hint of empathy. His first words in the film are addressed in a mean and condescending tone not to Prometheus, as in Aischylos' play, but to the northland miners as

they begin their descent into the mine. In Harrison's film, the music of the lyre that so charmed Apollo in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* becomes the eerie, metallic sound of the suspension cables of Newcastle's Humber Bridge being struck by the god (who is played by Michael Feast).¹¹

p.174

Hermes has even been a presence on the 'big screen' as well: as early as 1935 he featured as one among several statues of the Greek gods housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Arts that are brought to life when an oddball scientist discovers that his experiment has produced a ring with which he can turning living things to statues and statues into living beings. This film is a cinematic adaptation of the 1931 novel, *The Night Life of the Gods*, by Thorne Smith. Hermes also made his requisite appearance as the official agent of Zeus in the 1963 version of *Jason and the Argonauts*, when, in the guise of the invading army's seer, Hermes (played by Michael Gwynn) prevents the usurper, Pelias, from attacking until the infant Jason is conveyed safely away. Not only is Hermes functioning here as Zeus' agent, but his *kourotrophic* and mantic associations seem to be informing the choice of this god for this particular role in the tale. More recently, Hermes made his first appearance in the *Percy Jackson* series in the 2010 movie, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*.

When it comes to stage productions, Hermes also treads the boards most notably in the 2010 musical, *The Rite of Mercury: A Rock Opera*, in which Jon Sewell played the god, Spirit of the planet so named. This is one of a series of musicals based on the seven-play mystery-play cycle, *Rites of Eleusis*, written by the famous occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) and first performed in 1910. Mercury also makes an appearance in the production of Jacques Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, a two-act opera first staged in Paris in October 1858. Offenbach has no great reverence for the well-known tale of Orpheus and Eurydice underlying his 'version'; indeed, in this opera Eurydice has fallen in love with the Lord of the Underworld, disguised as a handsome youth, and when Orpheus plans to harm the youth and instead kills his wife, Pluto happily revives her and carries her below to live with him there. Mercury appears shortly after the scene changes to Olympus, with the god's return from his mission to the underworld to discover what had become of Eurydice, clearly here fulfilling his traditional roles as Jupiter's agent, scout and guide of the underworld.¹²

As well as being a character in a stage play, Hermes can serve as a writer's inspiration for other non-divine characters in several others works, in which one or more character is given one or more of his classical

talents. Thus, although not a character himself, the influence of Hermes has been identified as informing the construction of several characters in American Westerns set near the border of Mexico in the 1960s. Holtsmark (2001) sees the sheriff in *100 Rifles* (1969) as some sort of amalgamation of hero figure with Hermes to create someone who can enter an underworld-like territory representing Mexico to which his outlaw quarry has fled. In another Western of the same year, *The Wild Bunch*, an aged gang member named Sylls takes on attributes from both Hermes and Charon. Holtsmark observes: 'The black man, Sharp, as often in modern cinematic incarnations, is a Hermes figure, the *psychopompos* . . . who not only guides the hero into hell but also helps him return to the upper world' (2001: 31).

p.175

In Len Jenkin's play, *Five of Us*, each new event in the life of 'Herman' (the Hermes figure) allows a new aspect of the god to emerge. The audience learns in the first act that Herman, who is employed by the delivery service as a messenger, has concocted a plan to deceive his employer concerning a parcel which he has stolen by claiming that he was assaulted when trying to deliver it. To this end, he bashes a rock onto his own head. He is also a man who fantasises about travelling to far-flung places and even makes reservations in hotels to make his fantasy more real; however, he always cancels them in good time. In an adjoining apartment to Herman's are two couples, each with their own set of security issues; while the two women are gone, the two men break into Herman's apartment with the intention of stealing something of value. Unfortunately, Herman is home and this complication forces them to take him captive. In this state, Herman reveals through his mystical powers that he has been able to join them in bed at night and telepathically hear and see what they've been doing and planning; now that they have stolen the necklace which he himself had stolen, he 'gifts' it to them as a type of peace offering. Thereafter, taken by an unexpected seizure, Herman keels over dead; however, this event actually provides a resolution to the problems each of the couples were having, as they each can now see the world differently.

POETRY AND PROSE

As regards influence or inspiration, certainly for some writers of the 1800s, such as James Joyce and others afterwards, a hybrid Hermes-Thoth was *the* god of writers and a personal inspiration for their work. Shelley was so entranced by the god that he produced a versified translation of the

Homeric Hymn to Hermes composed of ninety-seven eight-verse stanzas: Stanza 1 reads:

Sing, Muse, the son of Maia and of Jove,
The Herald-child, king of Arcadia
And all its pastoral hills, whom in sweet love
Having been interwoven, modest May
Bore Heaven's dread Supreme. An antique grove
Shadowed the cavern where the lovers lay
In the deep night, unseen by Gods or Men,
And white-armed Juno slumbered sweetly then.¹³

Two novels on which movies were based have already been mentioned. In addition, a number of children's books have been written on the ancient Olympian gods and Hermes is no exception. *The Adventures of Hermes, God of Thieves* by Murielle Szac is one such book in which can be found 100 tales of adventure starring or involving Hermes. Others, such as *Hermes, Lord of Robbers* written by Penelope Paddrow and illustrated by Barbara Cooney, simply seek to retell the Fourth *Homeric Hymn* in more contemporary terms: this particular version does so with especially beautiful illustrations. In a novel twist, Stephanie Spinner undertakes to represent some of the well-known mythological tales from the perspective of Hermes in her novel, written for the young adult market, entitled *Quicksilver*, making an obvious allusion to the alternate name of the element mercury, so closely associated with the god in alchemy.¹⁴

p.176

While one might expect Hermes to be a popular character among children's fiction, he has a presence in adult fiction as well. Hermes plays the leading role in a 1998 translation of the comic novel by Sten Nadolny which is set in the closing decades of the 1900s and is entitled *The God of Impertinence* (B. Mitchell, trans.). It tells the tale of Hermes' release from a volcano in which he had been entrapped for 2,000 years for the purpose of assisting Hephaistos to destroy the world. Hermes, however, is dismayed by what he sees and decides to find out as much as he can about twentieth-century living by mind-reading: quite literally getting inside the heads of his chosen mortals. Realising that mortals are in need of his help, he manages to convince Hephaistos to risk the rulership of the world on the outcome of a poker game – a rather smart move for the god of 'luck'

and 'chance'! Despite the light-hearted tone, this tale shares a similar theme to that presented in Tony Harrison's *Prometheus*; however, rather than displacing the blame for man's condition onto the god of technology (for Harrison, Prometheus, Zeus and his underling, Hermes), Nadolny attributes Hephaistos' power over humans to their own desire for comfort and so makes Hermes' their potential saviour.

Hermes has also found a place in the poetry of the last two centuries. The poet H.D. composed a poem, entitled *Hermes of the Ways*, in which she refers to Hermes as 'facing three ways, welcoming wayfarers', recalling the Hermes Herms that used to offer comfort and directions to ancient travellers; indeed, it is especially reminiscent of epigram III.314 which addresses a Herm set up near the 'grey beach'. At the end of H.D.'s second stanza the god is addressed by name twice:

Hermes, Hermes

The great sea foamed,

Gnashed its teeth about me;

But you have waited,

Where sea-grass tangles with

Shore grass

– suggesting that the god had deliberately remained there to await his arrival, perhaps even ensuring his safe arrival to the very place.

In 1905 Rainer Maria Rilke published a ninety-five-line poem entitled *Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes.*, apparently after seeing the famous relief of the three figures, who are shown at the moment when Hermes is about to lead Eurydike back down to the underworld.¹⁵ In Rilke's prose-poem, Orpheus has been allowed to stride rapidly ahead, but his wife is prevented from keeping pace by the tightness of the burial clothes wrapped about her legs. In the description of the ascent Rilke allows Hermes' wings to be gently fluttering at his ankles as he walks ahead of Eurydike on her upward path with his *kerykeion* in one hand and his charge's hand in the other; perhaps such attention to the fluttering of the god's wings is meant to offset the relative immobility of Orpheus' wife. Then in a novel move, Rilke has Eurydike gradually become cognisant of herself as free and independent in the process of ascending and this causes her to be self-consciously uncomfortable with the touch of Hermes' hand. Thus, while Hermes is pained at Orpheus' loss of Eurydike when he announces, 'He has turned around', Eurydike has no sense of loss whatsoever: indeed it is Hermes who, in the end, must follow her as she

has already begun to walk the path in the other direction, back into Hades' realm. Hermes here, as often, is a supporting character in this poem, but he is dealt with sensitively as a god who can suffer with the mortals he oversees even while not wholly understanding their pain.

p.177

APPROPRIATIONS

While finding representations of Hermes/Mercury in the art and literature of modern western societies may not be too surprising, coming across him in other areas of modern life can be more so. But so versatile a god is Hermes that he has proved attractive in a number of places, some where he is least expected to appear.

Philosophy

Scholars in a number of fields from psychology to philosophy and on to cultural studies have adopted Hermes as the ancient power best representative of their approach or findings. Thanks in part to Plato's naming a branch of knowledge, those disciplines that rely on the 'interpretation' of their evidence, especially linguistic evidence, after the god, these disciplines are all to one degree or another engaged in the practice of 'hermeneutics': as has already been rehearsed, the very term for 'interpretation' or the finding of meaning contains the name of the god who oversees the practice. Moules opens her overview of the key figures in the history of hermeneutics with a paragraph on Hermes, who, as message-bringer, 'entices interpretation' (2002: 2). Diggs (2010) can turn to Hermes for assistance in explaining Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, while Serres, a twentieth-century philosopher, also avails himself of the god and his various attributes for their explanatory force in his critiques of the humanities' the sciences' and technology's failure (individually and collectively) to see, appreciate and embrace their inter-relatedness for the preservation of humanity. Indeed, in a 1993 Radio Quebec interview with Stéphan Bureau, Serres stated that it was Hermes 'who pilots' him, and throughout his work writes as though it is Hermes who draws things to his attention. Despite this, Serres is also aware that Hermes seems to be in cahoots with Prometheus in the privileging of the knowledge derived from the pure and applied sciences over that to be had from the equally important humanities.¹⁶

Hermes was also the figure in Greek myths from whom George Santayana took inspiration. In 1922, he devoted soliloquy 55 to the god,

entitling it *Hermes, the Interpreter* (259–64). Drawing on the idea of Hermes presented in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*, Santayana finds in the god a vibrant expression of his own philosophy, which, crudely put, is not quite as simple as *que sera sera* ('what will be will be'), but almost: Santayana sees in him a 'charming union . . . of youth with experience, alacrity with prudence, modesty with laughter, and a ready tongue with a sound heart,' a god whose 'mockery' turns to 'courtesy and helpfulness,' whose 'lies . . . are jests' (259) and who can take a joke (260). For Santayana Hermes 'cares not at all who makes the profit or who hoards the treasure, but that sagacity and the hum of business are delightful to him in themselves' (261), a god who 'loves riddles only because they are not riddles to him' (263).

p.178

Psychology

Perhaps the single most influential factor in the adoption of Hermes as the ancient Greek mythological figure through which to assess and analyse modern culture is the dissemination of the finding of psychologist, Carl Jung. A student of Freud, Jung departed from his teacher to put forward his own theory on the causes of mental illness, which involved the hypothesis that the human psyche was shaped by universal archetypes, such as the 'Mother,' the 'Eternal Youth' and 'the Shadow' among others. From Greek mythology, Jung identified Hermes as the eternal 'puer,' the boy-child who resists growing up. What Jung attributed to this psychic archetype, Paul Radin had already recognised in a specific type of mythological actor who appeared in the stories told by the First Nations peoples of Canada and the United States of America. Radin named this type the trickster. Nevertheless, it is the alchemical understandings of Mercury that played a major role in shaping Jung's psychological archetypes. In the first instance, Mercurius is representative of the unconscious itself, the essence of life. But in terms of his archetypes, Mercury is the 'eternal youth,' the boy who never grows up, the trickster. This is because Jung understood the unconscious to be both positively 'wonderful and ingenious' while also being 'dangerously deceptive' as a result of its numinosity.¹⁷

Given the importance of both the early and the developed alchemical and astrological insights to Jung's own theory of the archetypes, it is not surprising to find a modern psychologist applying Jung's thoughts on Mercury to a new approach which she calls psychological astrology. Believing Mercury to be undervalued by current practitioners of the

discipline, Edis reports that

astrologers know that Mercury and the third house show what interactions are likely to take place between siblings, but it is less well-known that these relationships affect the way in which a child later makes initial approaches to a friend or peer groups.

(1995: 6)

In a similar vein, she cautions that a lack of consideration of the potentially early interactions between the Greeks and the Egyptians suggests that '[w]hat we have traditionally received of Greek Hermes . . . may be very one-sided, curtailed and Euro-centric' (1995: 12). So Edis advocates for both a reassessment and a blending of more traditional Jungian archetypes founded upon a fuller understanding of all of Mercury's roles and abilities beyond those of the 'Eternal Child'.

In another astrologically based study with a focus on Mercury, Peay (2004) considers those three (and occasionally four) times in any given year when the planet Mercury appears to be 'moving backwards' with the aim of revealing the correlation between the timing of these particular astral phenomena and the roughly twenty-one-day periods during which more of our plans are frustrated than one would anticipate, so as to offer advice on how to make the most of these times in one's life. Although all planets have periods of apparent backward motion (retrograde) in their cycles, Mercury, being the closest to the sun and thus completing its cycles with greater frequency, is thought to have a greater effect on the earth than the other planets based on the old belief of 'sympathies' informing ancient astrology as well as alchemy and magical practices. That said, Peay also explains that Mercury's retrograde period is an appropriate time for re-visiting (literally and metaphorically) people, plans and activities that have been set aside over the normal course of daily living. Like Edis' astrologically informed psychology, this study engages with elements in Greek Hermes' 'historical' background derived from basic Graeco-Roman mythology and further afield, just as ancient astrology was wont to do in order to provide a type of therapeutic advice for dealing with the effects of Mercury during its retrograde phase in a manner that enhances one's life.¹⁸

p.179

Etymology

Much of higher education deals with attempts to come to a better understanding of our world, and these, in most cases, still rely on the

Hermetic activity of interpretation. In the early twentieth century the matter most in need of explanation and 'interpretation' was the origins of the god himself. This search for origins was spurred on by the work of Georges Dumézil and his Indo-European hypothesis which indicated that one might uncover Hermes' possible forerunner or equivalent among other people groups whose languages shared the Indo-European (I-E) roots. Particularly fruitful was the study of divinities found among the speakers of Vedic-based languages. Hocart (1970) published a comparative study of Hermes and Agni, Vedic god of fire, presenting some twenty-six points of similarity in the attributes and activities of the two gods. Hocart also proposed that the Vedic Brahman held an equivalent office to that of the Greek Herald according to the similar numbers of duties each performed, informed by Dumézil's hypothesis that similarities in linguistic matters tend to generate similarities in social structure. Critiquing Hocart, van Berg (2001) attempts to show that Agni and Hermes 'share a common origin' in the area of 'sacrifice, music, poetic inspiration and prophecy' which, in Hermes' case, is displaced onto Apollo. More recently, the similarities between Hermes and the Indic demigods known as Gandharvas have been identified by Allen and Woodard (2013), pointing to a shared I-E origin as third-function deities in the context of Dumézil's schema, while Briquel (1985) argued that Hermes resembled Indic Bhaga and Aryaman as an 'auxiliary' to sovereignty. Also informed by the I-E hypothesis, Larson (2005) has revealed the similarities in story pattern between the adventures of Hermes in the *Homeric Hymn* and the heroic coming-of-age tale of Indian Lugalbanda. None of these findings have been universally accepted; nevertheless, they do offer valuable insights into how language can work to shape our understanding of our environment.¹⁹

p.180

Commerce

There is an interesting correlation between this search for the ideal or original type and the archetypes proposed by Jung. While one might expect modern practitioners of Jungian psychology to continue to appeal to Hermes in their explanations of certain aspects of the psyche, Jung's archetypes have found their way into some surprising applications of his findings. Most recently, Harter (2016) has suggested that the relationship between Hermes and Hestia, as identified by Vernant in his groundbreaking study of these two gods, be adopted as a 'hermeneutics of leadership studies': the 'free-ranging, spastic, happy to scurry about delivering pointless messages that have no sanction, jerking his victims

this way and that, living in anticipatory anxiety' Hermes requires the staid and stable grounding of Hestia to make the most of his imaginative ideas. Bird (1992) prefers to see Mercury as the model entrepreneur, highlighting his 'appetite', 'vision of the possible', ability to change directions and to take action quickly as well as his interest in networking (as god of roads) as the key aspects of success for such individuals.²⁰

Hermes' name has also been appropriated to identify competitive awards 'honoring the messengers and creators of traditional and emerging media'; they are called the 'Hermes Creative Awards' and are sponsored by the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals in America – although the competition is international in its reach. After stating that the awards derive their name from Hermes, the 'ancient Greek messenger', the anonymous notice in *Marketing News Weekly* (22 May 2010) goes on to explain further the rationale behind the competition's name: 'In Greek mythology, Hermes is also the Olympian god of orators and wit, of literature and poets, and invention and commerce in general.' The provision of an explanation for the name suggests that many of those who would be competing for the awards may lack familiarity with the mythic figure and thus would not appreciate the significance of the name.

This is but one example of the business world's appropriation of Hermes and his associations for their own ends; there certainly are others. From plagiarism to computer hacking, Nikitina (2012: 135) puts Hermes forward as one of many trickster figures who may 'offer a working prototype of the hacker' and offers four qualities or elements that characterise the trickster god and the hacker: 'duplicity... boundary crossing... subversion of power... [and] creativity and craftsmanship' (2012: 136). Although Nikitina concludes that hackers' creativity is not actually innovative in the same way as is Hermes', other authors make use of the god's similarities with world tricksters to hold him up as an agent of change, persons whom Hartley (2010) calls 'paradigm shifters' for their ability to challenge complacency and motivate change. Patterson (2001) appeals to Hermes in his trickster aspects in conjunction with his oversight of contests to suggest that such a person would represent the 'anti-administration's anti-hero'; that is, someone who can see 'imaginative' uses of antagonism.

Taking another aspect of Hermes as her starting point, Daniela Carpi (2003) has attempted to claim the god's creative appropriation of another's property as representative of the clever literary output appearing at the end of the twentieth century. Although Carpi names Hermes in the title of her argument, he is never mentioned again, the assumption being that her readers know about the god and will be able to

‘read in’ and thus ‘read out’ the relationship she sees between her argument and the decision to use his name in the title. The problem associated with the ‘reading in’ and ‘reading out’ of ‘meaning’ in relation to literature is thus one that also happens to be related to Hermes, as has already been discussed. There is, of course, a certain irony in attempting to use the master manipulator of language and the overseer of hermeneutics as your own interpretative tool.

p.181

Emblems and advertisers

More successful are the appropriation of Hermes/Mercury’s image, which has become a particularly popular one to use as a way to suggest ‘speed,’ ‘commercial activity’ and ‘communication’ in the world of product promotion. The god has long been the emblem of the international florists’ network, the Florist Transworld Delivery (FTD), with his winged helmet and ankles speeding his stride as he rushes forward with a bouquet in the hand of his backward-extended right arm. So familiar is this image that Disney could exploit its relationship both with Hermes and with FTD by having Hermes first appear in *Hercules* as a delivery boy with a floral bouquet for Hera, one which he says he asked Orpheus to ‘arrange’ – here too making play with the fact that both music and flowers are called ‘arrangements’ (and Orpheus was another musical protégé on the lyre). So here Hermes is also the ‘witty’ god in addition to the rest of the associations at work in the scene.

The makers of an energy drink, exploiting the connection between Hermes and speed, adopted this god as a regularly appearing figure in their television commercials, claiming (tongue-in-cheek) that their product ‘gives you wings.’ Earlier in the 1990s a German car company, to emphasise the acceleration of their latest model, had Hermes pitted against the car in a race in which the car clearly won: an overly confident Hermes initially flies slightly ahead of the vehicle, peering into the windshield, but when he attempts to pull away, the car suddenly accelerates, leaving Hermes behind. In the case of these two advertisements, the first does not require the viewer to recognise the winged figure as Hermes; in the second, the point of the race would be lost on an audience member who did not know that the winged figure was the god renowned for superior speed.

A transportation company in Denver, Colorado named itself Hermes Worldwide, a company which offers chauffeured transportation to and from airports and to special events in major centres around the world. The

idea of the ‘special delivery’, somewhat akin to the privileged service Hermes provides to Zeus in Homer’s *Iliad* (2.100–8), may well underlie the decision to make use of the god’s name; that and Hermes’ guidance and protection of travellers. Further south in New Zealand, an electricity company bearing the name ‘Mercury’ had for its logo a runner in a pose similar to the FTD figure, only now he carried in his raised left hand a bolt of electricity, perhaps making the connection between the power-wielding god of the thunder-bolt, Zeus (Jupiter) and his delivery boy Hermes (Mercury).²¹

These uses of Hermes and his attributes are understandable; however, why Hermes’ *kerykeion* should have become the emblem of doctors and the medical profession would seem to be the result of mistaken identity. According to a notice in the *New York Times* (1 October 1985), the University of Rochester in New York, on behalf of its medical professionals, decided to replace the caduceus, a long-standing emblem of that profession since its adoption by the United States Marine Hospital Service in 1856, with the more appropriate symbol of Asclepius, the staff with a single upward-entwining snake around it. A similar recommendation to exchange Mercury’s caduceus for a symbol of more relevance to the medical community in Iran was made in 2010 by an Iranian doctor who questioned the relevance of Hermes and his wand to the profession.²²

p.182

Mass communication

More obviously connected with the idea of communication are the books, newspapers, magazines and audio-visual media with which the majority of twenty-first-century westerners engage on a daily basis. Not surprisingly, many early newspapers and periodicals adopted the name Hermes, and more usually Mercury, for their own: as both the messenger of official reports and the fastest of reporters, the name well suits those publications that provide daily and weekly editions, containing reports on events and decisions with the potential to have an immediate impact on their readers’ lives. Countless newspapers around the English-speaking world continue to be called *The Mercury*, typically inserting the name of their city as a type of epithet for the god: *The Queensland Mercury* (Australia), the *Leeds Mercury* (the UK) and so on.²³

A very significant early modern Greek periodical, known as *Hermes the Scholar* (*o Logios*), was published in Vienna, Austria between 1811 and 1821, which aimed to keep the Greeks in the Ottoman Empire informed of

major trends and developments in the arts and sciences across Europe and beyond. It ceased publication in 1921 with the advent of the Greeks' War of Independence. Another publication produced by the National Museum of Man, Ottawa (run by the National Museums of Canada also located in Ottawa), entitled *The Canadian Ethnology Service Mercury Series*, began in 1972 with the mandate to apprise its readers of significant publications dealing with matters of concern to the Service. These included publications on matters of 'History, Education and Cultural Affairs and National Programmes Divisions, Canadian Ethnology Service, Archaeological Survey of Canada, Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies and the Canadian War Memorial'. Clearly the adoption of the name 'Mercury' for this publication was informed by the god's Olympian function of delivering important news to others.²⁴

It should come as no surprise, then, that among the first communication satellites launched into space was one named 'Hermes', a Communications Technology Satellite designed to test the feasibility of what would be called 'Direct Broadcast Satellites' for sending high-power transmissions to be received by much smaller individually owned dishes. It was launched from Cape Canaveral in early January 1976 in a cooperative venture between Canada, the United States and the European Space Agency. An interesting demonstration of its capabilities was undertaken when it was used to broadcast the Stanley Cup hockey playoffs to Canadian diplomats in Peru, thereby proving its usefulness to the international community.

p.183

Hermes and Mercury both proved to be popular names for spacecraft of various kinds for obvious reasons. In the United States, a programme called Project Mercury operated between 1958 and 1963: it was tasked with designing the first module and rocket capable of placing humans into earth orbit and getting them back again safely. The first of the modules launched in this project was named Mercury-Atlas 1; it was followed by Mercury-Redstone 1 and finally by Mercury-Atlas 3. These were all unmanned modules launched in 1960 and '61, prior to the first American manned flight in May 1961. In the mid-1980s to the early '90s, the French, along with assistance from Germany and Italy, were heavily invested in developing a spaceplane that could carry Europeans into space for periods of thirty to ninety days: they too called their anticipated spaceplane Hermes. Other flying machines have borne Hermes' name as well: the American company General Electric was awarded a contract to develop a ballistic missile named Hermes in 1944, but it ended in 1954 without the production of a missile. However, General Electric did

produce a tactical ballistic missile named Hermes C-1 in 1946, which, following some changes in design, went into production as the Redstone in 1953. Also in the 1990s, the United States turned to the name of the messenger god again, now calling their programme to launch three spy satellites Mercury. Finally, in March 2011, an unmanned spacecraft named Messenger became the first to take a picture of the planet Mercury while in its orbit. One must acknowledge a certain irony in the spying of 'Messenger' on the planet whose name is practically synonymous with that very activity. More recently, in the movie *The Martian* (2015) a spacecraft serving as a shuttle between Mars and Earth is named Hermes in a space programme with the inauspicious name Ares!

But long before there were communication satellites and manned spaceships, when the telephone was first made available to the public, the prospects of long-distance communication were depicted as extending humanity's ability to share information with even the planets.

Although not the only planet represented in this promotional poster of 1877 ([Figure 9.4](#)), Mercury sits immediately beneath 'Sol' (the sun) in a position that invites the viewer to look at him before examining the cluster of planets in the upper-right-hand corner. More recently, the South American country of Ecuador adopted Hermes' name for their own foray into orbital internet communications in 2009, developing a clothing patch depicting a human-like male figure with stylised wings on his feet making a connection between a satellite's signal and a network of signals covering the earth: the 1877 telephone lines have now become microwaves effecting nanosecond communication through the rapidity of the invisible god of communication.²⁵

Given that Hermes, from our earliest glimpse of him in Homer, is a god with many talents, it is not surprising to find that he has been welcomed into so many aspects of contemporary western culture during each of the eras through which he has passed with us. One suspects that it is his most attractive combination of versatility with necessity that makes him practically an indispensable element with which any age must engage: from visual to literary arts, from studies of the mind to studies of the universe, Hermes has been represented and invoked as the spirit inspiring and directing (and, occasionally, thwarting) understanding and discovery. He easily 'translates' into new situations, and 'transforms' to suit the needs of those who engage with him. His very mobility and versatility permit Hermes to be called up to assist in periods of 'transition,' even those that sometimes appear to 'transpose' the established norms in order to 'transform' a society's understanding of itself and its relationship with the world. It would seem there is hardly an area of life in which Hermes cannot be seen to be operative: Hermes is by nature

‘transactional’ and insofar as this is true, he remains, even for us today, the representative of the power that makes connections and builds relationships.

p.184

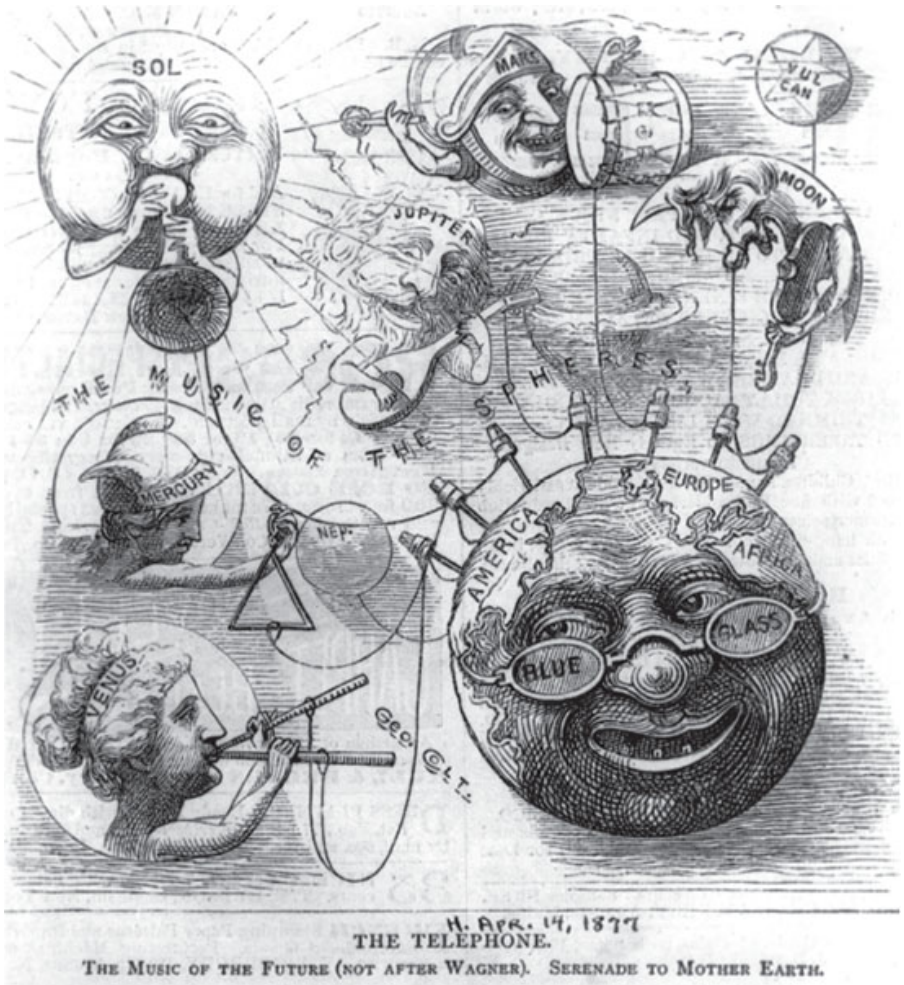


Figure 9.4 ‘The telephone. The music of the future (not after Wagner). Serenade to Mother Earth’, 1877. Cartoon on the theme of interplanetary telecommunications, relating to the recent invention of the telephone (patented in 1876)

HIP / Art Resource, NY

NOTES

- 1 Panofsky (1960: 50–4) discusses the reintroduction of images of the gods to the west. On the adoption of Arab figurative dress and occupations see Panofsky and Saxl (1933: 241); on the use of local, contemporary dress, see Panofsky (1960: 83). Panofsky and Saxl (1933: 246) also discuss Christine de Pisan’s illuminations of Mercury’s children in her book *Épître d’Othéa*.
- 2 For extended discussion of Mercury in Mantegna’s *Parnassus*, see Lehmann and Lehmann (1973). Miziolek (1993: 68–70) contains an informative discussion of the route by which Hermes is likely to have developed greatly enlarged shoulder and ankle wings in medieval art.
- 3 Also of frequent interest from the 1500s through to the 1800s were paintings and other depictions of Mercury escorting *Psyche* to Olympos, based on the second-century tale *Metamorphoses* (better known in English as *The Golden Ass*) by the Latin author Apuleius, such as that painted by Raphael (ca. 1517) to adorn the ceiling in a room called the Loggia of Psyche, in the Villa Farnesina at Rome (see [Chapter 7](#), [Figure 7.1](#)), where Mercury is functioning in Hermes’ capacity as literal ‘guide of the soul (*psyche*)’. But note the extended length of the caduceus and the exact symmetry of the serpents entwined around it, as well as the addition of wings at the top of what is now more appropriately called a staff than a wand.
- 4 See also Panofsky (1960: 193–200), Dempsey (1968) and Marmor (2003) for discussion of Mercury in Botticelli’s *Primavera*.
- 5 On the first cassone discussed, see Miziolek (2006); on the second, Miziolek (2007). For a fuller listing of artistic works in which Hermes is the subject or makes a significant appearance, see Reid (1993: 563–72).
- 6 See Tobin (2013) for copy of this political cartoon. Tobin has also revealed that Venus’ transit across the sun had inspired far more artistic output than has Mercury’s.
- 7 Hermes is also a welcome visitor to the island on which Hercules spends his youth in preparation for his future in Disney’s animated series entitled *Hercules: The Animated Series*.
- 8 In the incarnation of El Candare as Buddha, the other two fundamental principles were expressed: wisdom and self-reflection. For more on Hermes in this religious movement, see Winter (2013); for more detailed discussion of the movement, Astley (1995).
- 9 Hermes debuts in the young adult novel *DanMachi*, vol. 5 and *Sword Oratoria*, vol. 3; his first appearance in manga was in *Sword Oratoria*, [chapter 1](#) and he debuted in *DanMachi*, episode 2 and *Sword Oratoria*, episode 7. For discussion of yet another anime/manga story featuring a female Hermes, see Thouny (2009). The other members of the ‘Rockies’ are St. George, Mars and Medici: the series run was short, beginning 8 January 2016 and ending 25 March of the same year.
- 10 See <http://gameinfowire.com/news.asp?nid=12435> for pre-release details on the game.
- 11 The website, www.imdb.com/characters, lists 119 shows and five video games in which Hermes/Mercury makes an appearance from 1918 through to 2015.
- 12 The libretto for Offenbach’s opera was written by Hector Crémieux and Ludovic Halévy. The tenor, Jean-François Berthelier, played Mercury in the 1858 production.
- 13 See Tindall (1954), Newman (1992) and Fraser (1999) for discussions of Joyce’s

engagement with Hermes; for Shelley see Kahan (1992). His *Hymn to Mercury* can be found in a collection entitled *Posthumous Poems*, published in 1824 by his wife.

- 14 The Hermes' adventure book, published in 2015, was written by Murielle Szac and translated by Mika Provata-Carlone.
 - 15 See Greene and Herter (1945: 389).
 - 16 Serres' major work in five volumes is named after the god, with volume one tellingly named *Hermès I: La Communication* (1968). For Serres, Hermes becomes the mythological facilitator between the domains of the sciences, the humanities and the applied sciences (technology), exemplified in his 1982 book, *Hermes – Literature, Science, Philosophy*.
 - 17 For Mercurius as the unconscious see Jung's *Collected Works*, vol. 14: *Mysterium coniunctionis*, 2nd ed. (1970) and 'The Psychology of Transference' in vol. 16.
 - 18 The appeal of Hermes among some streams of psychological assistance is quite strong. Edinger (1994: 31) believes that depth psychology has Hermes as its patron. See also Cashford (2011, 2015).
 - 19 Although Dumézil's hypothesis does not work particularly well for the ancient Greeks (even though Greek is clearly a member of the I-E language group), it has been applied with intriguing results elsewhere, especially in Dumézil's own 1970 study of the Latin language and Roman organisation, available in P. Knapp's 1996 English translation; see also Watkins (1970). Allen and Woodward (2013) have identified several points of correspondence between Hermes and the Indic Gandharvas, while Leduc (2005: 16) can note in passing the Hermes-Agni-fire connection, although he does not go so far as to affirm his I-E standing as a fire-god. Duchemin (1960), working from a wholly different perspective in her study of Hermes and Apollo, found as close a relationship between pastoralists and poetic creations in Sumerian and Indic narratives as that represented in the Greek material.
- p.186
- 20 Harter's view is not informed by Jung directly, but rather via James Hillman's reinterpretation of Jung's insights (see Hillman 1979). For a more extended study of Hermes and business from a Jungian perspective, see Neville (2003).
 - 21 In August 2016 Mercury changed their logo from the striding figure with lightning bolt in hand to that of a bumblebee whose wings are created by an incomplete infinity figure eight with nodes defining the ends of the line, suggestive of an electrical circuit.
 - 22 This was an anonymous notice put out by the science desk for the paper.
 - 23 For discussion of the *Athenian Mercury*, see Starr (1967).
 - 24 For the subject matter covered by the *Mercury Series*, see Zimmerly (1980).
 - 25 Because English reads from left to right and top to bottom, advertisers realise that our reading habits tend to favour material on the left-hand side of a page from top to bottom; the position drawing the least attention is the lower-right corner of any page. This is why you tend not to find small ads in this portion of newspapers or magazines: if ads do appear here, they tend to be large and graphically eye-catching.



FURTHER READING

Rather like the god himself, discussions of Hermes are often ‘concealed’ within a larger work which is investigating some other subject matter, such as sacrifice or the *Homeric Hymns*, or fifth-century Athenian religion. More often than not, studies dedicated to Hermes are to be found in individual journal articles and book chapters examining some aspect of his mythology. Because this study has approached the god thematically, the majority of the books noted under ‘General studies’ (below) will touch on much of the material dispersed across Chapters 1–7 in this book for the Greek and Roman manifestations of the god and [Chapters 8](#) and [9](#) for his reception. Thus, listed under the title of each chapter the entries presented are limited to those which either address each chapter’s particular aspect of Hermes or indicate important books or chapters in which can be found directed information about the key theme of the chapter (for instance, naming authors who have looked at ancient Greek reciprocities for [Chapter 4](#)).

GENERAL STUDIES

Farnell (1909) provided the first lengthy study (eighty-four pages) of Hermes in English in his massive five-volume set, *The Cults of the Greek States*; however, the first full-length English study dedicated to the god was authored by Brown in 1947 and reprinted in 1969; despite its age, it continues to provide valuable information and insights, many of which continue to be accepted today. Another early study of the god is that by Otto (1954: 104–24) which is available in an English translation of the German original. Although his interpretation is generally not taken up by modern scholars, his study is certainly of historical interest. These two were followed by Clay’s (1989) study of the four major *Homeric Hymns*, which offered refreshing new insights into the nature of Hermes in the

chapter focused on the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*. Between them, Brown and Clay laid the groundwork on which the majority of subsequent studies are based, although each was informed by other studies in languages other than English. Since the early 2000s, there has been a resurgence of interest in the god, evidenced in the publication of several significant journal articles and book chapters in a variety of languages. The most accessible of these is Versnel's (2011) book, which contains a detailed study of Hermes in the *Hymn* in [chapter 4](#) and continuing references to the god throughout the book. Other article-length studies of Hermes can be found in the journals and book chapters mentioned in the Notes and listed in the Bibliography.

p.188

KEY THEMES

Chapter 1: Talents

Greene (2005) offers an informative study on the use of epithets in the Hermes *Hymn*. For a fuller discussion of how the 'same yet different' idea of a god came to be, see now Versnel (2011: ch. 1, esp. 37–84). On Hermes as sign-maker/interpreter, Kahn's (1978, French) study remains worth pursuing; more accessibly, Steiner (1994: 40–9, esp. 40) considers his sign-making and calls him a semiotician. To pursue an interest in signs and symbols in their own right, see Prier (1985), who discusses their use in archaic poetry; for the origin and use of *semata* ('signs') and the possible connection to coinage, see Spier (1991).

Chapter 2: Transmissions

To pursue more about the Eleusinian Mysteries and Hermes' connection to them, see Clinton (1974, 1979, 2004); Foley (1994); and Patera (2010). Blok and Lambert (2009: 116–19) offer a discussion of Kerykes' priesthood. See Kelly (2016: esp. 249) for the standard statement on the inviolability of Heralds; for more extended discussion, see Gagné (2015: 296–306) on 'The Wrath of Talthybios.' For the role of Heralds during the Peloponnesian War, see Lateiner (2001); see also Lewis (1996) on the importance of news, rumours and reports in ancient Greece.

Chapter 3: Transitions

On Herms as boundary markers, see, for example, Goldman (1942);

Chittenden (1947a); Burkert (1983: 39–41). For images of Herms receiving libations and offerings, see *LIMC* (5.2: 208–13). For an in-depth analysis of the two festivals celebrated by the Tanagrans, see Jaillard (2007b, French); see also Platt (2011: 17). Jost (1990: 214) notes that there are numerous bronze statues of Hermes Kriophoros in the north-eastern areas of Arkadia as well. For a more detailed description see Lamb (1925/6); Romano and Voyatzis (2014). For the seminal study of Hermes as the household god of mobility in opposition to Hestia as household goddess of fixity, see Vernant (1983: 127–75). For some discussion of Herms outside of Athens, see Medoni (1989). Burkert (1979), Costa (1982, Italian), Vidal-Naquet (1986) and now Marjorel (2003, French) are among those who allow that Hermes is likely to have been a god associated with youth initiation rituals. On age classes in ancient Greece, see also Papalas (1991); Scanlon (2002); Kyle (1987); for age classes in the cyclic games, see Sansone (1992); Scanlon (1998); for Spartan age classes, Ducat (2000, French).

Chapter 4: Transactions

There were several varieties of sacrifice in ancient Greece: Scullion (1994) offers a study contrasting Olympian and Chthonian sacrifices; Ekroth (2002) provides an extended study of sacrifice in hero cult and offers challenges to the Olympian/Chthonian division. Gill, Postlethwaite and Seaford (1998) provide a collection of essays on the importance of reciprocities to the Greeks; for the place of reciprocity in the Homeric epics, see Donlon (1982); for archaic Greece, Morris (1986). As a form of negative reciprocity the curse could prove a very satisfying response to a broken relationship: for fuller discussion of this activity see, for example, Faraone (1985, 1991); Gager (1992); Curbera and Jordan (1998); Elderkin (1936).

p.189

Chapter 5: Transpositions

Whether rightly or wrongly, of all the similarities that have been seen between trickster figures and Hermes, it is the transgressive potential that most captures the imagination. For studies of the trickster generally, see Radin (1956); Hynes and Doty (1993: 1–45); Hyde (1999). Several scholars view Prometheus as either a trickster or culture hero or both: Kerényi (1963); Babcock-Abrahams (1975); Koepping (1985); Beall (1991); Dougherty (2006: especially 27–45). The earliest study of Hermes as a trickster figure is Kerényi (1963), but general studies of the trickster

typically contain some discussion of Hermes. For the trickster as magician, see Brown (1969: 11–32) (although Kerényi [1996: 182–3] disagrees); see also Makarius (1974); for magic backfiring on tricksters, see Canonici (1994). For an appreciation of Hermes' contribution to the creation of laughter in Greek comedy, see Bowie (1993), and in the *Hymn* Vergados (2011) and Bungard (2011).

Chapter 6: Transcendence

Given that the importance of Hermes within the pantheon is generally deemed minor, the majority of studies retain an emphasis on the god as 'trickster', 'thief' and 'errand boy'. In contrast to Brown's (1969) argument, which sees Hermes' status diminished over time as society changes, Athanassakis (1989) argues movement in the other direction. Greene (2005) offers an interesting take on Hermes' gradual movement from illegitimate child to valued son in the Fourth *Homeric Hymn*, while Haft (1996) demonstrates that 'thieving' need not be a negative activity. S. Johnston (2002), like Haft, considers the *Hymn's* details in relation to 'rites-of-passage' and maturation tales: while not focused on Hermes' importance, Haft and Johnston do deal with one of the transitional moments closely associated with him: the transition from boy to man and the elevation in status that accompanies it in ancient Greece. Hocart's (1970) consideration of a king's support personnel goes some way to suggesting Hermes' 'translation' to a rulership position, but not without some methodological problems.

Chapter 7: Translations

Perhaps because of the narrowness of Hermes' avatar's role in Roman religion, there is no focused study of Mercury in Roman thought; nor, for that matter, is there one looking solely at Mercury's place in Roman literature and/or art. Rauh's (1993) assessment of Roman commerce as practised on the Greek island of Delos offers the most extended study of the strength of Mercury's associations in this area, while Wiseman (1995) gives due consideration to the Etruscans' 'Hermes' in the Roman foundation story. The literary Mercury fares a little better, but only in larger discussions of poems and narratives in which he plays a role. These appear primarily as journal articles; however, Cairns (1983) and Houghton (2007) on Horace and Littlewood (2001) on Ovid are worth pursuing, as are Miller (1991) and Phillips (1992).

Chapter 8: Transformations I

There is no single study tracking Hermes/Mercury from late antiquity through to the Renaissance, nor is there a study devoted solely to this god in the Renaissance or in any period thereafter. Rather, his reception must be traced through a number of books, articles and occasionally chapters which offer a discussion of individual works or larger studies of poets, authors and artists in which some discussion of the god's depiction or activity appears.

Long (1992) discusses the Stoics' allegorical readings of Homer, while Lamberton (1992b) provides an accessible study of the influence of Neoplatonism on later allegorical readings of Homer. Both Fowden (1986) and van Bladel (2009) move quite quickly away from the Graeco-Roman god to focus their discussions on Thoth/Hermes Trismegistos and his reception; nevertheless, they provide informative details on this particularly important stage in Hermes' career.

Chapter 9: Transformations II

For the period from late antiquity until the end of the mediaeval period, Jane Chance's two volumes contain frequent, brief discussions of Hermes'/Mercury's appearances in art and literature. Allen's (1970) study does the same for the god in the Renaissance as Chance's do for him in earlier periods. Seznec (1995), though one of the earliest to consider the 'revival' of the Greek gods in the Renaissance, remains a valuable study; Bull's (2005) examination of 'pagan' gods' representation in Renaissance art also contains brief discussions of Hermes/Mercury images. Yates (2002) provides an excellent background study of the introduction of Hermetic literature and its influence on Renaissance thinking; Allen (2001) offers a focused and accessible introduction to Ficino's thought. Bowen (1985) is one of the few studies to focus exclusively on the representation of Mercury in one art-form: emblems.

For modern receptions of the god, again, there is no self-contained study of Hermes in twentieth/twenty-first-century western societies. The same applies to a holistic investigation of Hermes' similarities to gods in other pantheons in the Indo-European language group. The closest approach to modern receptions is found among the philosophical and psychological theorists, who use the god's myths, character and abilities as a jumping-off point for their interpretative work: these include Kerényi (1996); Jung (1969, as well as 1968, especially (but not solely) in volume

14); Hillman (1979); and the series of studies undertaken by Serres (1968–80).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allan, A. (2004) 'Hermes *Agônistês* to Hermes *Agônios*: Chaos, Conflict and Hermes in Games and Competitive Festivals', in P.S.W. Bell & G.M. Davis (eds.) *Games and Festivals in Classical Antiquity*. London, 45–54.
- Allen, D. (1970) *Mysteriously Meant: The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance*. Baltimore, MD.
- Allen, M. (2001) 'Introduction', in M. Allen & V. Rees (eds.) *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*. Leiden, xiii–xxii.
- Allen, N. and R. Woodard (2013) 'Hermes and Gandharvas', *Nouvelle Mythologie Comparée* 1: 1–55.
- Allen, T. & Sikes, E. (eds., 1936) *The Homeric Hymns*. Oxford.
- Allen, T., Halliday, W. & Sikes, E. (eds., 1963) *The Homeric Hymns*. 2nd ed., Oxford.
- Al-Salihi, W. (1983) 'The Shrine of Nebo at Hatra', *Iraq* 45: 140–5.
- Ando, C. (2005) 'Interpretatio Romana', *Classical Philology* 100: 41–51.
- Anonymous (2010) 'PIA National Wins Four Hermes Creative Awards', *Marketing New Weekly*, 22 May 2010: 41.
- Anonymous, Science Desk (1985) 'Mercury, Patron of Thieves Is Found Unsuitable', *New York Times*, 1 October.
- Ascough, R., Harland, P. & Kloppenborg, J. (2012) *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook*. Waco, TX.
- Astley, T. (1995) 'The Transformation of Recent Japanese New Religion: Ōkawa Ryūhō and Kōfuku no Kagaku', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22: 343–80.
- Athanassakis, A. (1989) 'From Phallic Cairn to Shepherd God and Divine Herald', *Eranos* 87: 33–49.
- Athanassakis, A. (1992) 'Cattle and Honour in Homer and Hesiod', *Ramus* 22: 156–86.

- Athanassiadi, P. (1977) 'A Contribution to Mithraic Theology: The Emperor Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*', *Journal of Theological Studies* 28: 360–71.
- Athanassiadi, P. (1992) *Julian: An Intellectual Biography*. London.
- Babcock-Abrahams, B. (1975) "'The Tolerated Margin of Mess": Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered', *Journal of the American Folklore Institute* 11: 147–86.
- Bain, D. (2007) 'Low Words in High Places: Sex, Bodily Functions, and Body Parts in Homeric Epic and Other High Genres', in P.J. Finglass, C. Collard & N.J. Richardson (eds.) *Hesperos: Studies in Ancient Greek Poetry Presented to M. L. West on his Seventieth Birthday*. Oxford, 41–58.
- Bakker, E.J. (2005) *Pointing at the Past: From Formula to Performance in Homeric Poetics*. Cambridge, MA.
- Bakker, E. (2013) *The Meaning of Meat and the Structure of the Odyssey*. Cambridge.

p.192

- Bakola, E. (2005) 'Old Comedy Disguised as Satyr Play: A New Reading of Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* (P.Oxy. 663)', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 154: 46–58.
- Baldwin, Barry (1988) 'Fulgentius and His Sources', *Traditio* 44: 37–57.
- Baratta, G. (2001) *Il Culto di Mercurio nella Penisola Iberica*. Barcelona.
- Bar-Oz, G. (2001) 'An Inscribed Astragalus with a Dedication to Hermes', *Near Eastern Archaeology* 64: 215–17.
- Barton, T. (1994) *Ancient Astrology*. London.
- Barrett, J. (2002) *Staged Narrative Poetic and the Messenger in Greek Tragedy*. Berkeley, CA.
- Baswell, C. (1985) 'The Medieval Allegorization of the *Aeneid*: Ms Cambridge, Peterhouse 158', *Traditio* 41: 181–237.
- Bawcutt, P. (1981) 'Henryson's "Poeit od the Auld Fassoun"', *The Review of English Studies* 32: 429–34.
- Beall, E. (1991) 'Hesiod's Prometheus and Development in Myth', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52: 355–71.
- Beck, R. (1988) *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras*. Leiden.
- Beck, R. (2006) *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire: Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun*. Oxford.
- Beck, R. (2012) *A Brief History of Ancient Astrology*. Hoboken, NJ.
- Bednarz, J. (1996) 'The Collaborator as Thief: Raleigh's (Re)vision of *The Fairae Queene*', *ELH* 63: 279–307.

- Bell, H. (1948) 'Popular Religion in Graeco-Roman Egypt: I, The Pagan Period,' *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 34: 72–97.
- Benveniste, E. (1973) *Indo-European Language and Society*, E. Palmer (trans.). London.
- Berg, W. (1974) 'Hecate: Greek or Anatolian?', *Numen* 21: 128–40.
- Best, J. (2015) 'Roadside Assistance: Religious Spaces and Personal Experience in Athens,' in M. Miles (ed.) *Autopsy in Athens: Recent Archaeological Research on Athens and Attica*. Oxford, 100–7.
- Betz, H. (1986) *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*. Chicago, IL.
- Bird, B. (1992) 'The Roman God Mercury: An Entrepreneurial Archetype,' *Journal of Management Inquiry* 1: 205–12.
- Björklund, H. (2015) 'Invocations and Offerings as Structural Elements in the Love Spells in *Papyri Graecae Magicae*,' *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 9: 29–47.
- Blakely, S. (2012) 'Towards an Archaeology of Secrecy: Power, Paradox, and the Great Gods of Samothrace,' *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 21: 49–71.
- Blok, J. & S. Lambert (2009) 'The Appointment of Priests in an Attic Gene,' *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 169: 95–121.
- Bloomfield, M. (1958) 'The Eighth Sphere: A Note on Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, V 1809,' *Modern Language Review* 53: 408–10.
- Bobar, P. (1946) 'The Mithraic Symbolism of Mercury Carrying the infant Bacchus,' *Harvard Theological Review* 39: 75–84.
- Bowen, B. (1985) 'Mercury at the Crossroads in Renaissance Emblems,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 48: 222–9.
- Bowie, A. (1993) *Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual and Comedy*. Cambridge.
- Bremer, J. (1998) 'Greek Cult Poetry: Some Ideas behind a Forthcoming Edition,' *Mnemosyne* 51: 513–25.
- Brillante, C. (1990) 'Scene oniriche nei poemi omerici,' *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 24: 31–46.
- Briquel, D. (1985) 'Some Remarks about the Greek God Hermes,' *Mankind Quarterly* 26: 75–97.
- Brown, N. (1969) *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth*. New York, NY.

- Buchan, J. (1997) *Frozen Desire: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Money*. London.
- Buchholz, P. (1984) 'Odin: Celtic and Serbian Affinities of a Germanic Deity,' *Mankind Quarterly*; retrieved 27/08/2014. <http://www.fornsedclergy.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/>

- Bull, M. (2005) *The Mirror of the Gods: How the Renaissance Artists Rediscovered the Pagan Gods*. Oxford.
- Bungard, C. (2011) 'Lies, Lyres and Laughter: Surplus Potential in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes', *Arethusa* 44: 143–65.
- Burke, R. trans. (1928) *Roger Bacon: Opus Majus*. New York, NY.
- Burkert, W. (1979) *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*. Berkeley, CA.
- Burkert, W. (1983) 'Argos and Argeiphontes', in *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, P. Bing (trans.). Berkeley, CA, 161–8.
- Burkert, W. (1984) 'Sacrificio-sacrilegio: il "trickster" fondatore', *Studi Storici* 4: 835–45.
- Burkert, W. (1985) *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, L. Raffan (trans.). Oxford.
- Burkert, W. (1993) 'Concordia discors: The Literary and the Archaeological Evidence on the Sanctuary of Samothrace', in N. Marinatos & R. Hag (eds.) *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches*. London, 178–91.
- Burnell, F. (1948) 'Staves and Sceptres', *Folklore* 59: 157–64.
- Burnett, C. (1976) 'The Legend of the Three Hermes and Abū Ma'Shar's *Kitāb Al-Ulūf* in the Latin Middle Ages', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39: 231–4.
- Burriss, E. (1935) 'The Place of the Dog in Superstitions as Revealed in Latin literature', *Classical Philology* 30: 32–42.
- Burton, D. & D. Grandy (2004) *Magic, Mystery and Science: The Occult in Western Civilization*. Bloomington, IN.
- Bush, D. (1963) *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in Early English Poetry*. New York, NY.
- Butler, G (2002) "'And That a Winged Mercury Did Bear": Shakespeare's Mercury in *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*', *English Language Notes* 39: 18–27.
- Cairns, F. (1983) 'Alceaus' *Hymn to Hermes*, P.Oxy.2734 Fr.1 and Horace *Odes* 1.10', *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 13: 29–35.
- Calame, C. (2011) 'The Homeric Hymns as Poetic Offerings: Musical and Ritual Relationships with the Gods', in A. Faulkner (ed.) *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretative Essays*. Oxford, 334–57.
- Callaway, C. (1993) 'Perjury and the Unsworn Oath', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123: 15–25.
- Camp, J. (1996) *The Athenian Agora: Excavations in the Heart of Classical Athens*. London.

- Canonici, N. (1994) 'Hermes and the Zulu Tricksters', *Southern Africa Journal of Folklore Studies* 5: 1-25.
- Carastro, M. (2007) 'Quand Tirésias devint un mágos: Divination et magie en Grèce ancienne (V e IV e siècle av.n. è.)', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 224: 211-30.
- Carpenter, R. (1950) 'Argeiphontes: A Suggestion', *America Journal of Archaeology* 54: 177-83.
- Carpi, D. (2003) 'Hermes: God of Thieves: Plagiarism in Twentieth Century Literature', *Law and Critique* 14: 213-23.
- Cashford, J. (2011) 'The Myth of the Messenger', *ARAS Connections* 3: 1-20.
- Cashford, J. (2015) 'How Hermes and Apollo Came to Love Each Other in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*: Imagination and Form in Ancient Greece and Modern Psyche', in V. Rutter & T. Singer (eds.) *Ancient Greece, Modern Psyche: Archetypes Evolving*. New York, NY, 101-46.
- Cassio, A. (1981) 'A Typical Servant in Aristophanes (Pap. Flor. 112, Austin 63, 90ff)', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 41: 17-18.

p.194

- Cavallaro, F. (2006) 'The Alchemical Significance of John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica*', in S. Clucas, (ed.) *John Dee: Interdisciplinary Studies in English Renaissance Thought*. Dordrecht, 159-76.
- Chance, J. (1990) 'Mercury in the Garden: Mythographical Methods in the *Merchant's Tale* and *Decameron* 7.9', in J. Chance & R. Hamilton (eds.) *The Mythographic Art: Classical Fable and the Rise of the Vernacular in Early France and England*. Gainesville, FL, 192-214.
- Chance, J. (1994a) *Medieval Mythography: From Roman North Africa to the School of Chartres A.D. 433-1177*. Gainesville, FL.
- Chance, J. (1994b) *Medieval Mythography: From the School of Chartres to the Court at Avignon 1177-1350*. Gainesville, FL.
- Chaniotis, A. (1988) 'Habgierige götter-habgierige städte: Heiligtumsbesitz und gebietsanspruch in den kretischen Staatsverträgen', *Ktema* 13: 21-39.
- Chittenden, J. (1945) 'Hermes-Mercury, Dynasts and Emperors', *Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, 5: 41-57.
- Chittenden, J. (1947a) 'The Master of Animals', *Hesperia* 16: 69-114.
- Chittenden, J. (1947b) 'Some Methods of Research into the Origin of Greek Deities', *Greece and Rome* 16: 98-107.
- Chittenden, J. (1948) 'Diaktoros Argeiphontes', *America Journal of Archaeology* 52: 24-33.

- Christopoulos, M. (2006) 'Αὔλειος θῦρα et cadre religieux: le rencontre du public et du privé,' *Kernos* 19: 303–12.
- Ciardi, J. (1965) 'Dante Alighieri *Paradiso*: Canto Five,' *Poetry* 107: 75–84.
- Cinquemani, A.M. (1970) 'Henry Reynolds' *Mythomystes* and the Continuity of Ancient Modes of Allegoresis in Seventeenth-Century England,' *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association* 85: 1041–9.
- Clark, J. (1983) 'Marsilio Ficino among the Alchemists,' *Classical Bulletin* 59: 50–4.
- Clay, D. (1977) 'A Gymnasium Inventory from the Athenian Agora,' *Hesperia* 46: 259–67.
- Clay, J. (1972) 'The *Planktai* and *Moly*: Divine Naming and Knowing in Homer,' *Hermes* 100: 127–31.
- Clay, J. (1981–2) 'Immortal and Ageless Forever,' *Classical Journal* 77: 112–17.
- Clay, J. (1987) 'Hermes' *Dais* by the Alpheus,' *Hymn to Hermes* 105–41,' *Metis* 2: 221–34.
- Clay, J. (1989) *The Politics of Olympus: Form and Meaning in the Major Homeric Hymns*. Princeton, NJ.
- Clinton, D. (1974) 'The Sacred Officials of the Eleusinian Mysteries,' *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 64.3.
- Clinton, D. (1979) 'IG I2 5, Elusinia and the Eleusinians,' *American Journal of Philology* 100: 1–12.
- Clinton, D. (2004) 'A Family of Eumolpidae and Kerykes Descended from Pericles,' *Hesperia* 73: 39–57.
- Cohen, D. (1983) *Theft in Athenian Law*. München.
- Cole, J. (1997) 'The Muses of Homer and Hesiod: Comparative Musings,' *Scholía* 6: 168–77.
- Cole, S. (1996) 'Oath Ritual and the Male Community at Athens,' in J. Ober & C. Hedrick (eds.) *Dēmokratia: A Conversation on Democracies Ancient and Modern*. Princeton, NJ, 227–48.
- Collins, D. (2008) *Magic in the Ancient Greek World*. Hoboken, NJ.
- Combella, F. (1945) 'Speakers and Scepters in Homer,' *Classical Journal* 43: 209–17.
- Conacher, D. (1980) *Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound: A Literary Commentary*. Toronto.
- Constantakopoulou, C. (2015) 'Regional Religious Groups, Amphictionies, and Other Keagues,' in E. Eidinow & J. Kindt (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion*. Oxford, 274–90.
- Cooke, J. (1927) 'Euhemerism: A Mediaeval Interpretation of Classical Paganism,' *Speculum* 2: 396–410.
- Copenhaver, B. (1992) *Hermetica, The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the*

- Corbett, P. (1970) 'Greek Temples and Greek Worshippers: The Literary and Archaeological Evidence', *British Institute of Classical Studies* 17: 149–58.
- Costa, G. (1982) 'Hermes dio delle iniziazioni', *Civiltà classica e cristiana* 3: 277–95.
- Croissant, F. & F. Salviat (1966) 'Aphrodite gardienne des magistrats: gynéconomes de Thasos et polémarques de Thèbes', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 90: 460–71.
- Crummy, N. (2007) 'Brooches and the Cult of Mercury', *Britannia* 38: 225–30.
- Cunningham, D. (1955) 'The Jonsonian Masque as a Literary Form', *ELH* 22: 108–24.
- Curbera, J. & D. Jordan (1998) 'A Curse Tablet from the "Industrial District" Near the Athenian Agora', *Hesperia* 67: 215–18.
- Cursaru, G. (2014) 'Les Plantes, jalons du parcours catabasique d'Hermès dans l'Hymn homérique à Hermès', *Prometheus* 40: 38–69.
- Davidson, H. (1993) *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe*. London.
- Davidson, J. (1992) 'Tragic Daughter of Atlas?', *Mnemosyne* 45.1: 367–71.
- Davis, S. (1953) 'Argeiphontes in Homer: The Dragon-Slayer', *Greece and Rome* 22: 33–8.
- Deacy, S. (2007) *Athena*. London.
- Dee, J. (1994) *The Epithetic Phrases for the Homeric Gods (Epitheta deorum apud Homerum)*. New York, NY.
- De Grummond, N. (2006) *Etruscan Myth, Sacred History and Legend*. Philadelphia, PA.
- De Jáuregui, M. (2011) 'Priam's Catabasis: Traces of the Epic Journey to Hades in *Iliad* 24', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 141: 37–68.
- Dempsey, C. (1968) 'Mercurius Ver: The Sources of Botticelli's *Primavera*', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31: 251–73.
- Detienne, M. & J.-P. Vernant (1991) *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, J. Lloyd (trans.). Chicago, IL.
- Devereaux, R. (2005) 'Reconstructing Byzantine Constantinople: Intercession and Illumination at the Court of Phillippe le Bon', *French Studies* 59: 297–310.
- De Waele, F. (1927) *The Magic Staff or Rod in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*.

- Ghent.
- Dickie, M. (2010) *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World*. London.
- Dietrich, B.C. (1983) 'Tradition in Greek Religion', in R Hägg, (ed.) *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C.: Tradition and Innovation*. Proceedings of the Second International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult, organized by the Swedish Institute at Athens, 1–5 June 1981. Stockholm: 85–9.
- Diggs, R. (2010) 'The Divine Messenger and the Character of Hermeneutics', *Mythological Studies Journal* 1: 1–11.
- Dillon, M. (2015) 'Households, Families, and Women', in E. Eidinow & J. Kindt (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion*. Oxford, 241–50.
- Dobrov, G. (2007) 'Comedy and Satyr-Chorus', *Classical World* 100: 251–65.
- Donlon, W. (1982) 'Reciprocities in Homer', *Classical World* 75: 137–75.
- Doty, Wm. (1978) 'Hermes' Heteronymous Appellations', *Arche* 2: 17–35.
- Dougherty, D. (2006) *Prometheus*. London.
- Dowden, K. (1992) *Religion and the Romans*. London.
- Downes, W. (1904) 'The Offensive Weapon in the Pyrrhic', *Classical Review* 18: 101–6.
- Ducat, J. (2000) 'Perspectives on Spartan Education in the Classical Period', in S. Hodkinson & A. Powell (eds.) *Sparta: New Perspectives*. London: 43–66.
- Duchemin, J. (1960) *La Houlette et la Lyre I: Hermès et Apollon*. Paris.
- Dumézil, G. (1996) *Archaic Roman Religion*, 2 vols, P. Knapp (trans.). Baltimore, MD.
- Duncan, E. (1942) 'The Alchemy in Jonson's *Mercury Vindicated*', *Studies in Philology* 39: 625–37.
- Easterling, P. (1989) 'Agamemnon's SKĒPTRON in the Iliad', in M. MacKenzie & C. Rouché (eds.) *Images of Authority: Papers Presented to Joyce Reynolds on the Occasion of her 70th Birthday*. Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society Supp. 16, Cambridge, 104–21.

- Edinger, E. (1994) *The Eternal Drama: The Inner Meaning of Greek Mythology*. Baltimore, MD.
- Edis, F. (1995) *The God Between: A Study of Astronomical Mercury*. London.
- Ege, U. (2000) 'The Portrayals of the Universe in Medieval Literature',

- Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi 40: 255–74.
- Eichholz, D. (1949) 'Aristotle's Theory of the Formation of Metals and Minerals,' *Classical Quarterly* 43: 141–6.
- Eidinow, E. (2003) 'Dido, Aeneas, and Iulus: Heirship and Obligation in *Aeneid* 4,' *Classical Quarterly* 53: 260–7.
- Ekroth, G. (2002) *The Sacrificial Rituals of Greek Hero-Cults in the Archaic and Classical Periods*, Kernos Supp. 12. Liège.
- Elderkin, G. (1936) 'An Athenian Maledictory Inscription on Lead,' *Hesperia* 5: 43–9.
- Elmore, J. (1931) 'Horace and Octavian (*Car.* I. 2),' *Classical Philology* 26: 258–63.
- Entraglo, P. (1970) *The Therapy of the Word*, L. Rather & J. Sharp (trans.). New Haven, CT.
- Erder, Y. (1990) 'The Origin of the Name Idrīs in the Qur'ān: A Study of the Influence of Qumran Literature on Early Islam,' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 49: 339–50.
- Erickson, B. (2009) 'Roussa Ekklesia, Part 1: Religion and Politics in East Crete,' *American Journal of Archaeology* 113: 353–404.
- Evans, M. (1975) 'Mercury versus Apollo: A Reading of *Love's Labor's Lost*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26: 113–27.
- Evelyn-White, H. (1914) *Hesiod, Works and Days, Theogony and the Homeric Hymns*. Cambridge, MA.
- Evelyn-White, H. (1926) *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homeric*. London.
- Fachard, S. & D. Pirisino (2015) 'Routes Out of Attica,' in M. Miles (ed.) *Autopsy in Athens: Recent Archaeological Research on Athens and Attica*. Oxford, 139–53.
- Faivre, A. (1995) *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, J. Godwin (trans.). Grand Rapids, MI.
- Faraone, C. (1985) 'Aeschylus' ὕμνος δέσμιος (*Eum.* 306) and Attic Judicial Curse Tablets,' *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 105: 150–4.
- Faraone, C. (1991) 'The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells,' in C. Faraone & D. Obbink (eds.) *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*. Oxford, 3–32.
- Faraone, C. (1992) *Talisman and Trojan Horses: Guardian Statues in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual*. New York, NY.
- Farnell, L. (1909) 'The Cults of Hermes,' in *The Cults of the Greek States*, vol. 5. Oxford, 1–84.
- Felson, H. (2011) 'Children of Zeus in the *Homeric Hymns*: Generational Succession,' in A. Faulkner (ed.) *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretative Essays*. Oxford, 254–79.

- Ferguson, J. (1994) *The Religion of the Roman Empire*. Ithaca, NY.
- Fleay, F. (1879) 'Some Folk-Lore from Chaucer', *The Folk-Lore Record* 2: 135–62.
- Flachmann, M. (1979) 'Ben Jonson and the Alchemy of Satire', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 2: 259–80.
- Fletcher, J. (2008) 'The Trickster's Oath in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*', *American Journal of Philology* 129: 19–46.
- Fodor, A. (1970) 'The Origins of the Arabic Legends of the Pyramids', *American Journal of Archaeology* 103: 485–520.
- Foley, H. (1994) *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary and Interpretative Essays*. Princeton, NJ.
- Foley, J. (1999) *Homer's Traditional Art*. University Park, PA.
- Fowden, G. (1986) *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*. Princeton, NJ.
- Fowden, G. (1987) 'Pagan Versions of the Rain Miracle of A.D. 172', *Historia* 36: 83–95.

p.197

- Frame, D. (1978) *The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic*. New Haven, CT.
- Franke, W. (1994) 'Dante's Hermeneutic Rite of Passage: *Inferno* 9', *Religion and Literature* 26: 1–26.
- Fraser, J. (1999) 'Intertextual Turnarounds: Joyce's Use of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*', *James Joyce Quarterly* 36: 541–57.
- Freis, R. (1971) 'A Note on Horace's Hymn to Mercury (*Odes* 1.10)', *Classical Philology* 66: 182–3.
- Friedman, J. (1985) 'Henryson's *Testament to Cresseid* and the *Judicio Solis in Conviviis Saturni* of Simon of Couvin', *Modern Philology* 83: 12–21.
- Frothingham, A. (1916) 'Babylonian Origin of Hermes the Snake-God, and of the Caduceus', *American Journal of Archaeology* 20: 175–211.
- Furley, W. (1995) 'Praise and Persuasion in Greek Hymns', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115: 26–46.
- Furley, W. & J. Bremer (2001) *Greek Hymns: Selected Cult Songs from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period*, vol. 1: Texts in Translation. Tübingen.
- Gagarin, M. (1973) 'Dikê in the Works and Days', *Classical Philology* 68: 81–94.
- Gagarin, M. (1989) *Early Greek Law*. Berkeley, CA.
- Gager, J. (1992) *Curse Tablet and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*. Oxford.
- Gagné, P. (2015) 'Literary Evidence: Poetry', in E. Eidinow & J. Kindt (eds.)

- Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion. Oxford, 84–97.
- Gantz, T. (1996) *Early Greek Myths: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, 2 vols. Baltimore, MD.
- Garin, E. (1983) *Astrology in the Renaissance: The Zodiac of Life*, C. Jackson & J. Allen (trans.). London.
- Gentili, B. (1988) *Poetry and its Public in Ancient Greece*. Baltimore, MD.
- Georgoudi, S. (2010) 'Sacrificing to the Gods: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations', in J. Bremmer & A. Erskine (eds.) *The Gods of Ancient Greece: Identities and Transformations*. Edinburgh, 92–105.
- Gibbs, L. (2002) *Aesop's Fables: A New Translation*. Oxford.
- Gillhus, I. (1997) *Laughing Gods, Weeping Virgins: Laughter in the History of Religion*. London.
- Gill, C., N. Postlethwaite & R. Seaford, eds. (1998) *Reciprocities in Ancient Greece*. Oxford.
- Gill, D. (1991) *Greek Cult Tables*. New York, NY.
- Gilmour, G. (1997) 'The Nature and Function of Astragalus Bones from Archaeological Contexts in the Levant and Eastern Mediterranean', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 16: 167–75.
- Girard, R. (1989) *Violence and the Sacred*, P. Gregory (trans.). Baltimore, MD.
- Goblet-Cahen, C. (2007) 'Le héraut entre l'éphèbe et le satyre', *Revue historique* 309 (642): 259–83.
- Goldman, H. (1942) 'The Origin of the Greek Herm', *American Journal of Archaeology* 46: 38–68.
- Gombrich, E. (1945) 'Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of his Circle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 8: 7–60.
- Görgemanns, H. (1976) 'Rhetorik und poetik im homerischen Hermeshymnus', in H. Görgemanns & E. Schmidt (eds.) *Studien zum antiken Epos*. Meisnheim am Glan, 113–28.
- Graf, F. (1999) *Magic in the Ancient World*, F. Philip (trans.). Cambridge.
- Gräfe, G. (1973) 'Der homerische Hymnus auf Hermes', *Gymnasium* 70: 515–26.
- Grafton, A. (1983) 'Protestant versus Prophet: Issac Casaubon on Hermes Trismegistus', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46: 78–93.
- Greaves, A. (2012) 'Divination at Archaic Branchida-Didyma: A Critical Review', *Hesperia* 81: 177–206.
- Greene, E. (2005) 'Revising Illegitimacy: The Use of Epithets in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes', *Classical Quarterly* 55: 343–9.
- Greene, J. & M. Herter (1945) *Letters to Rainer Maria Rilke: 1897–1910*. New York, NY.

- Greenwood, D. (2014) 'Crafting Divine Personae in Julian's *Oration 7*', *Classical Philology* 109: 140–9.
- Grether, G. (1932) 'Pompeian Ministri', *Classical Philology* 27: 59–65.
- Griffin, A. (1991) 'Philemon and Baucis in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book 8, 611–724)', *Hermathena* 151: 51–62.
- Griffith, J. (1960) 'The Flight of the Gods before Typhon: An Unrecognized Myth', *Hermes* 88: 374–6.
- Griffith, M. (2015) 'The Earliest Greek Systems of Education', in W. Bloomer (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Education*. Chichester, 26–60.
- Griffith, R. (2008) 'Heralds and the Beginning of the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 2.1)', *Classical Philology* 103: 182–4.
- Gulizio, J. (2000) 'Hermes and *e-ma-a2*: The Continuity of His Cult from the Bronze Age to the Historical Period', *Živa Antika* 50: 105–16.
- Haden, J. (1983) 'Friendship in Plato's *Lysis*', *Review of Metaphysics* 37: 327–56.
- Hadzisteliou-Price, T. (1978) *Kourotrophos: Cults and Representations of the Greek Nursing Deities*. Leiden.
- Haft, A. (1996) 'The Mercurial Significance of Raiding: Baby Hermes and Animal Theft in Contemporary Crete', *Arion* 4: 27–48.
- Hägg, R. & B. Alroth, eds. (2005) *Greek Sacrificial Ritual, Olympian and Chthonian: Proceedings of the Sixth International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult*, organized by the Department of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History, Göteborg University, 25–7 April 1997, Stockholm.
- Hall, E. (2002) 'Tony Harrison's *Prometheus*: A View from the Left', *Arion* 3rd Series, 10: 129–40.
- Hamel, D. (2012) *The Mutilation of the Herms: Unpacking an Ancient Mystery*. New Haven, CT.
- Hamlin, B. (1974) 'Astrology and the Wife of Bath: A Reinterpretation', *Chaucer Review* 9: 153–65.
- Harrell, S. (1991) 'Apollo's Fraternal Threats: Language of Succession and Domination in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*', *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 31: 307–29.
- Harries, B. (1989) 'Causation and the Authority of the Poet in Ovid's *Fasti*', *Classical Quarterly* 39: 164–85.
- Harrison, E. (2000) 'Eumolpos Arrives at Eleusis', *Hesperia* 69: 267–91.
- Harrison, G., ed. (2005) *Satyr Drama: Tragedy at Play*. Swansea.

- Harter, N. (2016) 'On the Archetypes Hermes and Hestia: Notes towards a Hermeneutics of Leadership Studies,' *Integral Review* 12: 111–17.
- Hartley, J. (2010) 'Paradigm Shifters: Tricksters and Cultural Science,' *Cultural Science Journal* 3: 1–19.
- Hasenohr, C. (2001) 'Les monuments des collèges italiens sur "L'Agora des Compétaliastes" à Délos (IIe-Ier av. J.-C),' *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, Supp. 39: 329–48.
- Headlam, W. (1902) 'Ghost-Raising, Magic and the Underworld,' *Classical Review* 16: 52–61.
- Heather, P. (1943) 'The Seven Planets,' *Folklore* 54: 338–61.
- Heiden, B. (2010) 'Truth and Personal Agreement in Archaic Greek Poetry: The Homeric Hymn to Hermes,' *Philosophy and Literature* 34: 409–24.
- Henderson, J., ed. and trans. (2008) *Aeschylus III: Fragments*. Cambridge, MA.
- Henig, M., R. Cleary & P. Purser (1993) 'A Roman Relief of Mercury and Minerva from Aldsworth, Gloucestershire,' *Britannia* 31: 362–3.
- Henriskén, C. (2012) *Commentary on Martial, Epigrams Book 9*. Oxford.
- Herman, G. (1987) *Ritualized Friendship and the Greek City*. Cambridge.
- Herren, M. (2012) 'John Scottus and Greek Mythology: Reprising an Ancient Heremeutic in the Paris Commentary of Martianus Capella,' *Journal of Medieval Latin* 22: 95–116.
- Herter, H. (1976) 'Hermes: ursprung und wesen eines griechischen gottes,' *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 119: 193–241.

p.199

- Hexter, R. (1987) 'Medieval Articulations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: From Lactantian Segmentation to Arnulfian Allegory,' *Mediaevalia: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 13: 63–82.
- Hillman, J. (1979) 'Notes on Opportunism,' in J. Hillman (ed.) *The Puer Papers*. Dallas, TX, 152–65.
- Hocart, A. (1970) *Kings and Councillor: An Essay in the Comparative Anatomy of Human Society*. Chicago, IL.
- Holland, J. (1970) 'The Gods of *The Winter's Tale*,' *Pacific Coast Philology* 5: 34–8.
- Holmyard, E.J. (1957) *Alchemy*. Harmondsworth.
- Holtsmark, E. (2001) 'The *katabasis* Theme in Modern Cinema,' in M. Winkler (ed.) *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*. Oxford, 23–56.
- Hopkins, A. (1934) *Alchemy, Child of Greek Philosophy*. New York, NY.

- Hornblower, G. (1943) 'The Egyptian Fertility-Rite: Postscript', *Man* 43: 26–34.
- Houghton, L. (2007) 'Horace, *Odes* I.10: A Very Literary Hymn', *Latomus* 66: 636–41.
- Hübbe, R. (1959) 'Decrees from the Precinct of Asklepios at Athens', *Hesperia* 28: 169–201.
- Hübner, W. (1986) 'Hermes als musischer gott', *Philologus* 130: 153–74.
- Huizinga, J. (1971) *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. London.
- Humphrey, C. & S. Hugh-Jones (1992) 'Introduction: Barter, Exchange and Value', in C. Humphrey & S. Hugh-Jones (eds.) *Barter, Exchange and Value: An Anthropological Approach*. Cambridge, 1–20.
- Hussey, G. (1890) 'The Distribution of Hellenic Temples', *American Journal of Philology* 6: 59–64.
- Hyde, L. (1999) *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*. New York, NY.
- Hyde, W. (1946) 'Roman Ideas of the Hereafter', *Classical Weekly* 39: 157–60.
- Hynes, W. & Wm. Doty, eds. (1993) *Mythical Trickster Figures*. Tuscaloosa, AL.
- Ingman H. & F. Ingman (1989) 'Silence, Harpocrates and the *Cymbalum Mundi*', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 51: 569–77.
- Ingram, J. (2012) "'You Ha'done me a Charitable Office": Autolycus and the Economics of Festivity in *The Winter's Tale*', *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 65: 63–74.
- Isrealowich, I. (2008) 'The Rain Miracle of Marcus Aurelius: (Re-)Construction of Consensus', *Greece and Rome* 55: 83–102.
- Jaillard D. (2001) 'Le pilier hermaïque dans l'espace sacrificiel', *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité*, 113: 341–63.
- Jaillard, D. (2007a) Configurations d'Hermès: Une 'théogonie hermaïque', *Kernos Supp.* 17, Liège.
- Jaillard, D. (2007b) 'Les fonctions du mythe dans l'organisation spatiale de la cité', *Kernos* 20: 131–52.
- Jameson, M. (1991) 'Sacrifice before Battle', in V. Hanson (ed.) *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience*. London, 197–227.
- Jameson, M. (1994) 'Theoxenia', in R. Hagg (ed.) *Ancient Greek Cult Practice from the Epigraphical Evidence*. Proceedings of the Second International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult organized by the Swedish Institute at Athens, 22–4 November 1991, Stockholm, 35–57.
- Janko, R. (1982) *Homer, Hesiod and the Hymns: Diachronic Development in Epic Diction*. Cambridge.

- Jannot, J.-R. (2000) 'Etruscans and the Afterworld', *Etruscan Studies* 7: 81–99.
- Johnston, R. & D. Mulroy (2009) 'The *Hymn to Hermes* and the Athenian Altar of the Twelve Gods', *Classical World* 103: 3–16.
- Johnston, S. (1990) *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature*. Atlanta, GA.
- Johnston, S. (1991) 'Crossroads', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 80: 214–24.
- Johnston, S. (1999) *The Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*. London.
- p.200
- Johnston, S. (2002) 'Myth, Festival, and Poet: The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* and its Performative Context', *Classical Philology* 97: 109–32.
- Jones, J. Jr. (1987) 'Aeneid 4.238–78 and the Persistence of an Allegorical Interpretation', *Vergilius* 33: 29–37.
- Jones, J. Jr. (1989) 'The So-called Silverstris Commentary on the *Aeneid* and Two Other Interpretations', *Speculum* 64: 835–48.
- Jones, N. (2015) 'Phantasms and Metonyms: The Limits of Representation in Fifth-Century Athens', *Art History* 38: 814–37.
- Jost, M. (1985) *Sanctuaires et cultes d'Arcadie*. Paris.
- Jost, M. (1990) 'Sanctuaires ruraux et sanctuaires urbains en Arcadie', in A. Schachter (ed.) *Le Sanctuaire grec: huit exposés suivis de discussions*. Genève, 205–39.
- Jung, C. (1968) *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung XIV: Alchemical Studies*. New York, NY.
- Jung, C. & Kerényi, K. (1969) *Introduction to a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*. New York, NY.
- Kadletz, E. (1981) 'The Tongues of Greek Sacrificial Victims', *Harvard Theological Review* 74: 21–9.
- Kahan, C. (1992) 'Shelley's *Hymn to Mercury*: Poetic Praxis and the Creation of Value', *Studies in Romanticism* 31: 147–69.
- Kahane, H. & A. Pietrangeli (1966) 'Picatrix and the Talismans', *Romance Philology* 19: 574–93.
- Kahn, L. (1978) *Hermès Passe: les ambiguïtés de la communication*. Paris.
- Kaimio, M. (1974) 'Music in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*', *Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica* 8: 29–43.
- Kaufman-Heinimann, A. (2007) 'Religion in the House', in J. Rüpke (ed.) *A Companion to Roman Religion*. Oxford, 188–201.

- Kelly, D. (2016) 'Diplomacy', in S. Phong, T. Spence, D. Kelly & P. Londry (eds.) *Conflict in Ancient Greece and Rome: The Definitive Political, Social and Military Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, CA, 249–51.
- Kelly, E. (2009) 'A Note on the Name Hermoathena and its Lepidopteran Namesakes', *Hermathena* 186: 59–76.
- Kerényi, K. (1963) *Prometheus: Archetypal Image of Human Existence*, Ralph Manheim (trans.). New York, NY.
- Kerényi, K. (1996) *Hermes, Guide of Souls*, revised ed., M. Stein (trans.). Woodstock, CT.
- Kidron, C. (2006) 'The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*: A Journey across the Continuation of Paradox', *Semiotica* 158: 35–69.
- Kirkland, S. (2007) 'Logos as Message from the Gods: On the Etymology of "Hermes" in Plato's *Cratylus*', *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 12: 1–14.
- Klauck, H. (1994) 'With Paul in Paphos and Lystra: Magic and Paganism in the Acts of the Apostles', *Neotestamentica* 28: 93–108.
- Klibansky, R., E. Panofsky & F. Saxl (1964) *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*. New York, NY.
- Klingshirn, W. (2003) 'Isidore of Seville's Taxonomy of Magicians and Diviners', *Traditio* 58: 59–90.
- Knudson, R. (2012) "'I Wasn't Born Yesterday": Sophistic Argumentation in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*', *Classical Philology* 107: 341–9.
- Koepping, K.-P. (1985) 'Absurdity and Hidden Truth: Cunning Intelligence and Grotesque Body Images as Manifestations of the Trickster', *History of Religions* 24: 191–214.
- Kopestonsky, T. (2016) 'The Greek Cult of the Nymphs at Corinth', *Hesperia* 85: 711–77.
- Kouser, R. (2015) 'The Mutilation of the Herms: Violence towards Images in the Late Fifth Century', in M. Miles (ed.) *Autopsy in Athens: Recent Archaeological Research on Athens and Attica*. Oxford, 76–84.

p.201

- Krauskopf, I. (2006) 'The Grave and Beyond in Etruscan Religion', in E. Simon & N. de Grummond (eds.) *The Religion of the Etruscans: The Sixth Annual Langford Conference, Florida State University, Tallahassee* 18–20–2, 1999. Austin, TX, 66–89.
- Kurke, L. (1991) *Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy*. Ithaca, NY.
- Kurke, L. (1995) 'Herodotus and the Language of Metals', *Helios* 22: 36–64.
- Kurke, L. (1999) *Coins, Bodies, Games and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in*

- Archaic Greece. Princeton, NJ.
- Kyle, D. (1987) *Athletics in Ancient Athens*. Leiden.
- Laird, A. (2003) 'Figures of Allegory from Homer to Latin Epic', in G.R. Boys-Stones (ed.) *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions*. Oxford, 152–76.
- Laird, E. (1972) 'Astrology and Irony in Chaucer's *Complaint of Mars*', *Chaucer Review* 6: 229–31.
- Lamb, W. (1925/6) 'Arcadian Bronze Statuettes', *Annual of the British School at Athens* 27: 133–48.
- Lamberton, R. (1986) *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Readings and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*. Berkeley, CA.
- Lamberton, R. (1992a) 'Introduction', in R. Lamberton & D. Keaney (eds.) *Homer's Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes*. Princeton, NJ, 7–24.
- Lamberton, R. (1992b) 'The Neoplatonists and the Spiritualization of Homer', in R. Lamberton & D. Keaney (eds.) *Homer's Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes*. Princeton, NJ, 115–33.
- Lamont, J. (2015) 'Asklepios in the Pireaus and the Mechanisms of Cult Appropriation', in M. Miles (ed.) *Autopsy in Athens: Recent Archaeological Research on Athens and Attica*. Oxford, 37–50.
- Langdon, S. (1918) 'The Babylonian Conception of the Logos', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (July): 433–49.
- Larson, J. (1997) 'The Corycian Nymphs and the Bee Maidens of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*', *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 36: 341–57.
- Larson, J. (2001) *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, Lore*. Oxford.
- Larson, J. (2005) 'Lugalbanda and Hermes', *Classical Philology* 100: 1–16.
- Larson, J. (2007) *Ancient Greek Cults: A Guide*. London.
- Larson, J. (2016) *Understanding Greek Religion*. London.
- Lateiner, D. (2001) 'Humiliation and Immobility in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 131: 217–55.
- Lavelle, B. (1985) 'Hipparchos' Herms', *Echoes du Monde Classique* 29: 411–20.
- Lebedev, A. (1996) 'Pharnabazos, the Diviner of Hermes: Two Ostraka with Curse Letters from Olbia', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 112: 268–78.
- Lebessi, A. (1976) 'A Sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite in Crete', P. Muhly (trans.), *Expedition* 3: 2–13.
- Lebessi, A. & P. Muhly (1987) 'The Sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite at

- Syme, Crete' *National Geographic Research* 3: 102–13.
- Lebessi, A. & P. Muhly (1990) 'Aspects of Minoan Cults, Sacred Enclosures: The Evidence from the Syme Sanctuary (Crete)', *Archaeologischer Anzeiger*, 315–36.
- Leduc, C. (2005) "'Le Pseudo-sacrifice d'Hermès", *Hymne homérique à Hermès 1*, vers 112–142', *Kernos* 18: 141–65.
- Lehmann, P. & K. Lehmann (1973) 'The Sources and Meaning of Mantegna's *Parnassus*', in *Samothracian Reflections: Aspects of the Revival of the Antique*. Princeton, NJ.
- Leigh, M. (2002) 'Ovid and the Lectisternium (*Metamorphoses* 8.651–60)', *Classical Quarterly* 52: 625–7.
- Leventi, I. (2007) 'The Mondragone Relief Revisited: Eleusinian Cult Iconography in Campania', *Hesperia* 76: 107–41.

p.202

- Lewis, D. (1996) *News and Society in the Greek Polis*. London.
- Liebeschuetz, J. (1979) *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion*. Oxford.
- Lincoln, B. (1976) 'The Indo-European Cattle Raiding Myth', *Harvard Theological Review* 16: 42–65.
- Lincoln, B. (1982) 'Mithra(s) as Sun and Saviour', in U. Bianchi & M. Vermaseren (eds.) *La Soteriologie dei Culti Orientali nell'Impero Romano*. Leiden, 505–26.
- Lintott, A. (1982) *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City*. London.
- Littlewood, R. (1975) 'Two Elegaic Hymns: Propertius 3.17 and Ovid *Fasti* 5.663–92', *Latomus* 34: 622–74.
- Littlewood, R. (2001) 'Ovid among the Family Dead: The Roman Founder Legend and Augustan Iconography in Ovid's *Feralia* and *Lemuria*', *Latomus* 60: 916–35.
- Llewellyn-Jones, L. (2003) *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Women of Ancient Greece*. Swansea.
- Lloyd-Jones, H. (2003) 'Zeus, Prometheus, and Greek Ethics', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 101: 49–72.
- Long, A. (1992) 'Stoic Reading of Homer', in R. Lamberton & D. Keaney (eds.) *Homer's Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes*. Princeton, NJ, 41–66.
- Lonsdale, S. (1993) *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion*. Baltimore, MD.
- López-Ruiz, C. (2015) 'Gods: Origins', in E. Eidinow & J. Kindt (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion*. Oxford, 369–82.

- Lowe, J. (2009) 'Terence and the Running Slave Routine,' *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 152: 225–34.
- Luraghi, N. (2009) 'The Importance of Being λόγιος,' *Classical World* 102: 439–56.
- Lyne, R. (2005) 'Horace *Odes* Book 1 and the Alexandrian Edition of Alcaeus,' *Classical Quarterly* 55: 542–58.
- MacFarlane, K. & Isidore of Seville (1980) 'Isidore of Seville on the Pagan Gods (*Origines* VIII.11),' *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 70: 1–40.
- Maier, B. (1996) 'Is Lug to be Identified with Mercury (*Bell. Gall.* VI 17.1)? New Suggestions on an Old Problem,' *Ériu* 47: 127–35.
- Mairs, R. (2011) 'Translator, Traditor: The Interpreteur as Traitor in Classical Tradition,' *Greece and Rome* 58: 64–81.
- Makarius, L. (1974) 'The Magic of Transgression,' *Anthropos* 69: 537–52.
- Marchetti, P. (1993) 'Reserches sur les myths et la topographie d'Argos, I. Hermès et Aphrodite,' *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 117: 211–23.
- Marinatos, N. (2000) *The Goddess and the Warrior: The Naked Goddess and Mistress of Animals in Early Greek Religion*. London.
- Marjorel, F. (2003) 'Hermès ou le mouvement spiralé de l'initiation,' *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 1: 53–81.
- Marmor, M. (2003) 'From Purgatory to *Primavera*: Some Observations on Botticelli and Dante,' *Artibus et Historiae* 24.48: 199–212.
- Martin, L. (1995) 'Gods or Ambassadors of God? Barnabus and Paul in Lystra,' *New Testament Studies* 41: 152–6.
- Martin, R. (2010) 'Apolo, el ejecutante,' in A.M. González de Tobia (ed.) *Mito y performance: De Grecia a la Modernidad*. La Plata, 17–42.
- Matsumoto, M. (2013) 'Divine Interventions: Invocations of Deities in Personal Correspondence from Graeco-Roman Egypt,' *Classical World* 106: 645–63.
- Matthews, V. (1974) 'The *Hermerodromoi*: Ultra Long-Distance Running in Antiquity,' *Classical World* 68: 161–9.
- Maury, L.-F.A. (1857) *Histoire des religions de la Grèce antique*. Paris.
- Mauss, M. (1990) *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, W.D. Halls (trans.). London.

- McDonnell, M. (1986) 'Ambitus and Plautus' *Amphitruo* 65–81,' *American Journal of Philology* 107: 564–76.
- McInverney, J. (2010) *The Cattle of the Sun: Cows and Culture in the World*

- of the Ancient Greeks. Princeton, NJ.
- Medoni, L. (1989) 'More Inscriptions from Keos,' *Annual of the British School at Athens* 84: 289–96.
- Michaelowski, C. (1930) 'Les Hermès du gymnase de Délos,' *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 54: 131–46.
- Mikalson, J. (1998) *Religion in Hellenistic Athens*. Berkeley, CA.
- Milik, J. & J. Teixidor (1961) 'New Evidence on the North-Arabic Deity Aktab-Kutbâ,' *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 163: 22–5.
- Millar, S. (1974) 'The Altar of the Six Goddesses in Thessalian Pherai,' *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 7: 231–52.
- Miller, J. (1993) 'Ovidian Allusion and the Vocabulary of Memory,' *Materiali e discussion per l'analisi dei testi classici* 30: 153–64.
- Miller, P. (1991) 'Horace, Mercury and Augustus, or the Poetic Ego of *Odes* 1–3,' *American Journal of Philology* 112: 365–88.
- Mitchell, L. (1997) *Greeks Bearing Gifts: The Public Use of Private Relationships in the Greek World, 435–323 B.C.* Cambridge.
- Miziołek, J. (1993) 'Europa and the Winged Mercury on Two Cassone Panels from the Czartoryski Collection,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56: 63–74.
- Miziołek, J. (2006) 'The *Odyssey* Cassone Panel from the Lanckoroński Collection: On the Origins of Depicting Homer's Epic in the Art of the Italian Renaissance,' *Artibus et Historiae* 53: 57–88.
- Miziołek, J. (2007) 'The Awakening of Paris and the Beauty of the Goddesses: Two "Cassoni" from the Lanckoroński Collection,' *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 51: 299–36.
- Mondi, R. (1980) 'Σκηπτοῦχοι Βασιλεῖς: An Argument for Divine Kingship in Early Greece,' *Arethusa* 13: 203–16.
- Morris, I. (1986) 'Gift and Commodity in Archaic Greece,' *Man* 21: 1–17.
- Morris, I. & B. Powell, eds. (1997) *A New Companion to Homer*. Leiden.
- Mortley, R. (1972) 'Apuleius and Platonic Theology,' *American Journal of Philology* 93: 584–90.
- Most, G. (1989) 'Cornutus and Stoic Allegoresis: A Preliminary Report,' *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.36.3: 2014–65.
- Motte, A. (2008) 'L'expression de l'émotion musicale dans les *Hymnes homérique* de l'époque archaïque,' *Kernos* 21: 155–72.
- Moules, N. (2002) 'Hermeneutic Inquiry: Paying Heed to History and Hermes an Ancestral, Substantive, and Methodological Tale,' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1: 1–21.
- Muratov, M. (2015) 'The Northern Black Sea: The Case of the Bosporan Kingdom,' in E. Eidinow & J. Kindt (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Ancient*

- Greek Religion. Oxford, 590–605.
- Murgatroyd, P. (2003) 'Ovid, *Fasti* 2.585–616 and Virgil *Aeneid* 12', *Classical Quarterly* 53: 311–13.
- Murgia, C. (1988) '*Aeneid* 9.236: An Unrecognized Vergilian Variation', *Hermes* 116: 493–9.
- Muse, K. (2005) "'Don't Dally in this Valley': Wordplay in *Odyssey* 15.10 and *Aeneid* 4.271', *Classical Quarterly* 55: 646–9.
- Mylonopoulos, J., ed. (2010) *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome*. Leiden.
- Nagy, G. (1989) 'Early Greek Views of Poets and Poetry', in G. Kennedy (ed.) *Cambridge Literary Criticism I*. Cambridge, 1–77.
- Nagy, G. (1990) *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of the Epic Past*. Baltimore, MD.
- Nagy, G. (2004) *Homer's Text and Language*. Urbana, IL.
- Nagy, J. (1983) 'The Deceptive Gift in Greek Mythology', *Arethusa* 16: 191–204.

p.204

- Naiden, F. (2012) *Smoke Signals for the Gods: Animal Sacrifice from the Archaic through Roman Periods*. Oxford.
- Nelson, M. (2001) 'A Note on Apuleius' Magical Fish', *Mnemosyne* 54: 85–6.
- Nesselrath, H.-G. (1995) 'Myth, Parody, and Comic Plots: The Birth of Gods in Middle Comedy', in G. Dobrov (ed.) *Beyond Aristophanes: Transition and Diversity in Greek Comedy*. Atlanta, GA, 1–27.
- Neville, B. (2003) 'Taking Care of Business in the Age of Hermes', *Trickster's Way* 2:1, Article 4, at <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/trickstersway/vol2/iss1/4>.
- Newman, R. (1992) 'Narrative Transgression and Restoration: Hermetic Messengers in *Ulysses*', *James Joyce Quarterly* 29: 315–37.
- Nikitina, S. (2012) 'Hackers as Tricksters of the Digital Age: Creativity in Hacker Culture', *Journal of Popular Culture* 45: 133–52.
- Nisbet, R. & M. Hubbard (1970) *A Commentary of Horace: Odes Book 1*. Oxford.
- Norris, E. (1935) 'Hermes and the Nymph in *Lamia*', *ELH* 2: 322–6.
- Nowotny, K. (1949) 'The Construction of Certain Seals and Characters in the Work of Agrippa of Nettesheim', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12: 46–57.
- Ogden, D. (2001) *Greek and Roman Necromancy*. Princeton, NJ.

- Ogden, D. (2008) *Night's Black Agents: Witches, Wizards and the Dead in the Ancient World*. London.
- Ogilvie, R. (1969) *The Romans and their Gods in the Age of Augustus*. New York, NY.
- Olmstead, G. (1994) *The Gods of the Celts and the Indo-Europeans*. Budapest.
- Orgogozo, J. (1949) 'L'Hermès des Achéens,' *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 136: 10–30, 139–79.
- Osanno, M. (1992) 'Il culto do Hermes Agoraios ad Atene,' *Revisita di antichità* 1: 215–22.
- Otto, W. (1954) 'Hermes,' in *The Greek Gods*, M. Hadas (trans.). New York, NY, 104–24.
- Page, D. (1979) *Sappho and Alcaeus: An Introduction to the Study of Lesbian Poetry*. Oxford.
- Page, S. (2006) 'Image-Magic Texts and a Platonic Cosmology at St. Augustine's Canterbury, in the Late Middle Ages,' in C. Burnett & W. Ryan (eds.) *Magic and the Classical Tradition*. London, 69–98.
- Palmer, L. (1998) *The Interpretation of Mycenaean Greek Texts*. Oxford.
- Panofsky, E. (1960) *Renaissance and Renaissances in Western Art*. Stockholm.
- Panofsky, E. & F. Saxl (1933) 'Classical Mythology in Mediaeval Art,' *Metropolitan Museum Studies* 4: 228–80.
- Papakonstantinou, Z. (2007) 'Legal Procedure in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*,' *Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquité* 54: 83–110.
- Papalas, A. (1991) 'Boy Athletes in Ancient Greece,' *Stadion* 17: 165–92.
- Parker, R. (1996) *Athenian Religion: A History*. Oxford.
- Parker, R. (2005) *Polytheism and Society at Athens*. Oxford.
- Patera, I. (2010) 'Light and Lighting Equipment in the Eleusinian Mysteries,' in M. Christopoulos, E.D. Karakantza & O. Levaniouk (eds.) *Light and Darkness in Ancient Greek Myth and Religion*. Lanham, MD, 261–75.
- Patterson, P. (2001) 'Imagining Anti-administration's Anti-hero (Antagonist? Protagonist? Agonist?),' *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 23: 529–40.
- Patton, K. (2009) *Religion of the Gods: Ritual, Paradox and Reflexivity*. Oxford.
- Peay, P. (2004) *Mercury Retrograde: Its Myth and Meaning*. New York, NY.
- Penglase, C. (1994) *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia: Parallels and Influences in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod*. London.
- Pépin, J. (1958) *Mythe et allégorie*. Aubier.
- Petrovic, I. (2010) 'The Life Story of a Cult Statue as an Allegory:

- Phillips, C. III (1992) 'Roman Religion and Literary Studies of Ovid's *Fasti*', *Arethusa* 25: 55–80.
- Pingree, D. (2001) 'From Alexandria to Baghdād to Byzantim: The Transmission of Astrology', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 8: 3–37.
- Platt, V. (2011) *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion*. Cambridge.
- Poddrow, P. (1971) *Hermes, Lord of Robbers*, with B. Cooney, Illustrator. Garden City, NY.
- Podlecki, A., ed. (2005) *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*. Oxford.
- Pollitt, J. (1965) 'The Egyptian Gods in Attica: Some Epigraphical Evidence', *Hesperia* 34: 125–30.
- Preller, L. & Robert, C. (1894) *Greichische Mythologie*, 4th ed., 2 vols. Berlin.
- Prier, R. (1985) *Thauma Idesthai: The Phenomenology of Sight and Appearance in Archaic Greece*. Tallahassee, FL.
- Puttfarken, T. (1980) 'Golden Age and Justice in Sixteenth-Century Florentine Political Thought and Imagery: Observations on Three Pictures by Jacopo Zucchi', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43: 130–49.
- Radin, P. (1956) *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. New York, NY.
- Raingear, P. (1934) *Hermès Psychagogue: Essai sur les origines du culte d'Hermès*. Paris.
- Rauh, N. (1993) *The Sacred Bonds of Commerce: Religion, Economy, and Trade Society at Hellenistic Roman Delos, 166–87 bc*. Amsterdam.
- Reece, S. (1997) 'A Figura Etymologica in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes', *Classical Journal* 93: 29–39.
- Reece, S. (2007) 'Homer's Asphodel Meadow', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 47: 389–400.
- Reid, J. with C. Rohmann (1993) *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300–1990s*. New York, NY.
- Relihan, J. (1993) 'Martianus Capella', in *Ancient Menippean Satire*. Baltimore, MD, 137–51.
- Richardson, L. (1973) 'The Name "Hermathena"', *Hermathena* 115: 13–18.

- Richardson, N. (1992) 'Aristotle's Reading of Homer and its Background', in R. Lamberton & D. Keaney (eds.) *Homer's Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic's Earliest Exegetes*. Princeton, NJ, 30–40.
- Richardson, N. (2010) *Three Homeric Hermes to Apollo, Hermes and Aphrodite*. Cambridge.
- Ricketts, M. (1966) 'The North American Indian Trickster', *History of Religions* 5: 327–50.
- Ridgely, B. (1963) 'The Cosmic Voyage in French Sixteenth-Century Learned Poetry', *Studies in the Renaissance* 10: 136–62.
- Ridley, R. (1968) 'Notes on the Establishment of the Tribune of the Plebs', *Latomus* 27: 535–54.
- Rives, J. (2007) *Religion in the Roman Empire*. Malden, MA.
- Rives, J. (2011) 'Roman Translation: Tacitus and Ethnographic Interpretation', in P. Harland (ed.) *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*. Kitchener, ON, 165–83.
- Robbins, F.E. (1916) 'The Lot Oracle at Delphi', *Classical Philology* 11: 278–92.
- Robinson, M. (2011) *Ovid Fasti Book 2*. Oxford.
- Roisman, H. (1990) 'Kerdion in the Iliad: Profit and Trickiness', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 120: 23–35.
- Rolet, A. (2009) 'Les métamorphoses d'Hermès/Mercure dans les *Symbolicae Quaestiones d'Achille Bocchi*', in R. Duits & F. Quiviger (eds.) *Images of Pagan Gods: Papers of a Conference in Memory of Jean Seznec*. London, 199–249.
- Romano, D. & M. Voyatzis (2014) 'Mt. Lykaion Excavation and Survey Project, Part 1: The Upper Sanctuary', *Hesperia* 83: 569–52.
- Roos, A. (2008) "'Magic Coins" and "Magic Squares": The Discovery of Astrological Sigils in the Oldenberg Letters', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* 62: 271–88.
- Rothchild, V. (1984) 'The Parliament of Fowls: Chaucer's Mirror up to Nature?', *Review of English Studies* 35: 164–84.

- Sahlins, M. (1968) 'Poor Man, Rich Man, Big Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia', in A.P. Vayda (ed.) *Peoples and Cultures of the Pacific: An Anthropological Reader*. New York, NY, 157–76.
- Salviat, F. (1964) 'Religion populaire et timbres amphoriques: Hermès; Hélène et les ΔΟΚΑΝΑ', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 88: 486–95.
- Sansone, D. (1992) *Greek Athletics and the Genesis of Sport*. Berkeley, CA.
- Saylor, C. (1979) 'Horace, C. 1.2 and Vergil's Storm (Aen. 1.81ff)', *Vergilius*

- Saxl, F. (1970) 'The Revival of Late Antique Astrology', in H. Honour & J. Fleming (eds.) *The Heritage of Images: A Selection of Lectures by Fritz Saxl*. Harmondsworth, 27–41.
- Scanlon, T. (1998) 'Gymnikê Paideia: Greek Athletics and the Construction of Culture', *Classical Bulletin* 74: 143–57.
- Scanlon, T. (2002) *Eros and Greek Athletics*. Oxford.
- Schachter, A. (2000) 'Greek Deities: Local and Panhellenic Identities', in P. Flensted-Jensen, T.H. Nielsen & L. Rubinstein (eds.) *Polis and Politics: Studies in Ancient Greek History*. Copenhagen, 9–17.
- Schachter, A. (2003) 'Evolutions of a Mystery Cult: The Theban Kabiroti', in M. Cosmopoulos (ed.) *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults*. London, 112–42.
- Schachter, A. (2016) *Boiotia in Antiquity: Selected Papers*. Cambridge.
- Scheinberg, S. (1979) 'The Bee Maidens of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 83: 1–28.
- Schnur, H. (1972) 'Petronius: Sense and Nonsense', *Classical World* 66: 13–20.
- Schumacher, R. (1993) 'Three Related Sanctuaries of Poseidon: Geraistos, Kalaureia and Tainaron', in N. Marinatos & R. Hagg (eds.) *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches*. London, 62–87.
- Scott, F. (1956) 'The Seventh Sphere: A Note on *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Modern Language Review* 51: 1–5.
- Scott, K. (1928) 'Mercur-Augustus und Horaz C.1.2', *Hermes* 63: 15–33.
- Scranton, R. (1951) *Corinth I.iii: Monuments in the Lower Agora and North of the Archaic Temple*. Princeton, NJ.
- Scullard, H. (1981) *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*. Ithaca, NY.
- Scullion, S. (1994) 'Olympian and Chthonian', *Classical Antiquity* 13: 75–119.
- Seaford, R. (1994) *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State*. Oxford.
- Sealey, R. (1976) 'The Pit and the Well: The Persian Heralds of 491 B.C.', *Classical Journal* 72: 13–20.
- Serres, M. (1968–80) *Hermes*, 5 vols. Paris.
- Serres, M., J. Harari & D. Bell (1982) *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*. Baltimore, MD.
- Seznec, J. (1995) *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, B. Sessions (trans.). Princeton, NJ.
- Shaw, C. (2010) 'Middle Comedy and the "Satyric Style"', *American Journal*

- Shelmerdine, S. (1981) 'The Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*: A Commentary, 1–121', Unpub. PhD Diss., Michigan.
- Shelmerdine, S. (1984) 'Hermes and the Tortoise: A Prelude to Cult', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 25: 201–8.
- Siebert, G. (1990) 'Hermes', in *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*, Vol. 5.1 and 5.2. Zurich.
- Siebert, G. (2005) 'Nommer Hermès dans la tragédie Grecques', in N. Belayche, P. Brulé, G. Greyburger, Y. Lehmann, L. Pernot & F. Prost (eds.) *Nommer des dieux: théonymes, épithète, épiclèses dans l'Antiquité*. Turnhout, 263–9.

p.207

- Silver, Isidore (1971) 'Ronsard's Theory of Allegory: The Antinomy between Myth and Truth', *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 18: 363–407.
- Simpson, C. (2002) 'Exegi monumentum: Building Imagery and Metaphor in Horace, *Odes* 1–3', *Latomus* 61: 57–66.
- Smith, R. (1995) *Julian's Gods: Religion and Philosophy in the Thought and Action of Julian the Apostate*. London.
- Smyser, H. (1970) 'A View of Chaucer's Astronomy', *Speculum* 45: 359–73.
- Sokolowski, S. (1964) 'Aphrodite as Guardian of Greek Magistrates', *Harvard Theological Review* 57: 1–8.
- Sommerstein, A. & J. Fletcher, eds. (2007) *HORKOS: The Oath in Greek Society*. Exeter.
- Sowa, C. (1984) *Traditional Themes and the Homeric Hymns*. Chicago, IL.
- Spier, J. (1991) 'Two Hellenistic Gems Rediscovered', *Antike Kunst* 34: 91–6.
- Spiers, J. (2006) 'A Revival of Antique Magical Practice in Tenth-Century Constantinople', in C. Burnett & W. Ryan (eds.) *Magic and the Classical Tradition*. London, 29–36.
- Stafford, E. (2012) *Herakles*. London.
- Stahl, W. & R. Johnson, with E. Burge, eds. and trans. (1977) *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts, Vol. II: The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*. New York, NY.
- Stahl, Wm. (1965) 'To a Better Understanding of Martianus Capella', *Speculum* 40: 102–15.
- Stančo, L. (2012) *Greek Gods in the East: Hellenistic Iconographic Schemes in Central Asia*. Prague.
- Starnes, T. & E. Talbert (1955) *Classical Myth and Legend in Renaissance Dictionaries: A Study of Renaissance Dictionaries in their Relation to the*

- Classical Learning of Contemporary English Writers*. Chapel Hill, VA.
- Starr, G. (1967) 'From Casuistry to Fiction: The Importance of the *Athenian Mercury*', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28: 17–32.
- Stavrianopoulou, E., ed. (2006) *Ritual and Communication in the Graeco-Roman World*, *Kernos Supp.* 16. Centre International d'Etude de la Religion Grecque Antique. Liège.
- Stearns, M. (1944) 'The Planet Portraits of Robert Henryson', *Publications of the Modern Languages Association* 59: 911–27.
- Steiner, D. (1994) *The Tyrant's Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece*. Princeton, NJ.
- Steiner, D. (2001) *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Literature and Thought*. Princeton, NJ.
- Stevenson, W. (1972) '*Lamia*: A Stab at the Gordian Knot', *Studies in Romanticism* 11: 241–52.
- Stewart, A. (2003a) 'Alkamenēs at Ephesus and in Athens', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 143: 101–3.
- Stewart, A. (2003b) 'Alkamenēs' "Two Hermes" Again', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 145: 107–8.
- Stewart, G. (1976) '*Lamia* and the Language of Metamorphosis', *Studies in Romanticism* 15: 3–41.
- Stillwell, G. (1956) 'Convention and Individuality in Chaucer's *Complaint of Mars*', *Philological Quarterly* 35: 69–89.
- Stinton, T. (1965) *Euripides and the Judgement of Paris*, Supp. 11, Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies. London.
- Storey, I. (2011) *Fragments of Old Comedy*, vols 1–3. Cambridge, MA.
- Strugnell, J. (1959) 'The Nabataean Goddess Al-Kutbā and Her Sanctuaries', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 156: 29–36.
- Sutton, D. (1980) *The Greek Satyr Play*. Meisenheim am Glan.
- Tate, J. (1929a) 'Plato and Allegorical Interpretation', *Classical Quarterly* 23: 142–54.
- Tate, J. (1929b) 'Cornutus and the Poets', *Classical Quarterly* 23: 41–5.
- Taylor, F. (1951) *The Alchemists: Founders of Modern Chemistry*. New York, NY.
- Thalmann, W. (1984) *Conventions of Form and Thought in Early Greek Epic Poetry*. Baltimore, MD.

- Thompson, D. (1967) 'Dante's Ulysses and the Allegorical Journey,' *Dante Studies* 85: 33–58.
- Thompson, P. (2002) *The Accidental Theorist: The Double Helix of Everyday Life, Book 1, The Hestia Trilogy*. New York, NY.
- Thouny, C. (2009) 'Waiting for the Messiah: The Becoming-Myth of *Evangelion* and "Densha otoko"', *Mechademia* 4: 111–29.
- Tindall, W. (1954) 'James Joyce and the Hermetic Tradition,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15: 23–39.
- Tobin, W. (2013) 'Transits of Venus and Mercury as Muses,' *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* 16: 224–49.
- Too, Yun Lee (1996) 'Statues, Mirrors, Gods: Controlling Images in Apuleius,' in J. Elsner (ed.) *Art and Text in Roman Culture*. Cambridge, 133–52.
- Toutain, J. (1932) 'Hermès dieu social chez les Grecs,' *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 12: 289–329.
- Trypanis, C., ed. (1978) *Callimachus, Aetia, Iambi, Lyric Poems, Hecale, Minor Epic and Elegiac Poems and Other Fragments: Text, Translation and Notes*. Cambridge, MA.
- Tsoukala, V. (2009) 'Honorary Shares of Sacrificial Meat in Attic Vase Painting: Visual Signs of Distinction and Civic Identity,' *Hesperia* 78.1: 1–40.
- Turcan, R. (2001) *The Gods of Ancient Rome: Religion in Everyday Life from Archaic to Imperial Times*, A. Nevill (trans.). London.
- Tzifopoulos, Y. (2000) 'Hermes and Apollo at Onchestos in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*: The Poetics and Performance of Proverbial Communication,' *Mnemosyne* 53: 148–63.
- Usener, H. (1904) 'Psithyros,' *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 59: 623–4.
- Valvo, M. (1978) "'Tu princeps auctorque sacri, Cyllene, tanti . . .': La rivincita dell'uomo Maniliano bel segno di Hermes,' *Sileno* 4: 111–28.
- Van Berg, P.-L. (2001) 'Hermes and Agni: A Fire-God in Greece?', in M. Huld, K. Jones-Bley, A. Volpe & M. Dexter (eds.) *Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Series*, No. 40. Washington, DC, 189–204.
- Van Bladel, K. (2009) *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science*. Oxford.
- Van Der Sluijs, M. (2009) 'Who are the "Attendants of Helios"?', *Journal of American Oriental Studies* 129: 169–77.
- Van Straten, F. (1995) *Hiera Kala: Images of Animal Sacrifice in Archaic and Classical Greece*. Leiden.
- van Wees, H. (1992) *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and Society*. Amsterdam.
- Van Windekens, A. (1961) 'Réflexions sur la nature et l'origine du dieu

- Hermès', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 104: 289–301.
- Van Windekens, A. (1962) 'Sur le nom de la divinité grecque Hermès', *Beitrage zur Namensforschung* 13: 290–2.
- Venit, M. (1988) 'The Painted Tomb from Wardian and the Decoration of Alexandrian Tombs', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 25: 71–91.
- Ventris, M. & J. Chadwick (1956) *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*. Cambridge.
- Vergados, A. (2011) 'The Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*: Humour and Epiphany', in A. Faulkner (ed.) *The Homeric Hymns: Interpretative Essays*. Oxford, 82–104.
- Vernant, J.-P. (1983) 'Hermes-Hestia: The Religious Expression of Space and Movement in Ancient Greece', in *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*. London, 127–75.
- Versnel, H. (2011) 'A God: Why is Hermes Hungry?', in *Coping with the Gods: Wayward Readings in Greek Theology*. Leiden, 309–77.
- Vidal-Naquet, P. (1986) *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, A. Szegedy-Maszak (trans.). Baltimore, MD.
- p.209
- Volk, K. (2009) *Manilius and His Intellectual Background*. Oxford.
- Volokhine, Y. (2004) 'Le dieu Thot et la parole', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 221: 131–56.
- von Eitrem, S. (1906) 'Der Homerische Hymnus an Hermes', *Philologus* 65: 248–82.
- von Reden, S. (1995a) *Exchange in Ancient Greece*. London.
- von Reden, S. (1995b) 'Poetry and its Value Reconsidered', *Classical Quarterly* 45: 30–50.
- von Rudloff, R. (1999) *Hekate in Ancient Greek Religion*. Victoria, BC.
- Voss, K (1998) 'Spiritual Alchemy: Interpreting Representative Texts and Images', in R. Broek & W. Hanegraaff (eds.) *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*. Albany, NY, 147–81.
- Waddington, R. (1970) 'The Iconography of Silence and Chapman's Hercules', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33: 248–63.
- Walbridge, J. (1998) 'Explaining Away the Greek Gods in Islam', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59: 389–403.
- Walcot, P. (1978) 'Cattle Raiding, Heroic Tradition and Ritual: the Greek Evidence', *History of Religions* 18: 326–51.
- Walsh, G. (1984) *Varieties of Enchantment: Early Greek Views of the Nature and Function of Poetry*. Chapel Hill, VA.

- Warburg, A. (1999) 'On Images of Planetary Deities in the Low German Almanac of 1519 [1908]', in D. Britt (trans.) *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*. Los Angeles, CA, 593–6.
- Ward, J. (1980) 'Witchcraft and Sorcery in the Later Roman Empire and the Early Middle Ages', *Prudentia* 12: 93–108.
- Ward, J. (1988) 'Magic and Rhetoric from Antiquity to the Renaissance: Some Ruminations', *Rhetorica* 6: 57–118.
- Watkins, C. (1970) 'Studies in Indo-European Legal Language, Institutions and Mythology', in G. Cardona, H.M. Hoenigswald & A. Senn (eds.) *Indo-European and Indo- Europeans*. Philadelphia, PA, 321–54.
- Watson, E. (1993) 'The Mythological Union of Eloquence and Wisdom', in *Achille Bocchi and the Emblem Book as Symbolic Form*. Cambridge.
- Webster, G. (1986) *The British Celts and Their Gods Under Rome*. London.
- Webster, J. (1995) "'Interpretatio": Roman Word Power and the Celtic Gods', *Britannia* 26: 153–61.
- Webster, T.B.L. (1948) 'South Italian Vases and Attic Drama', *Classical Quarterly* 42: 15–27.
- Webster, T.B.L. (1975) 'Homeric Hymns and Society', in J. Bingen, G. Cambier & G. Nachtergaele (eds.) *La Monde grec: pensée, littérature, histoire, documents: hommage à Claire Préaux*. Bruxelles, 86–93.
- Weill-Parot, N. (2006) 'Contriving Classical References for Talismanic Magic in the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance', in C. Burnett & W. Ryan (eds.) *Magic and the Classical Tradition*. London, 163–76.
- Welcker, F. (1957) *Griechische Götterlehre*, vol. 3. Göttingen.
- West, M., ed. (1966) *Hesiod's Theogony*. Oxford.
- West, M., ed. (1978) *Hesiod's Works and Days*. Oxford.
- West, M. (1997) *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry*. Oxford.
- West, M., ed. and trans. (2003) *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer*. Cambridge, MA.
- West, S. (1969) 'The Greek Version of the Legend of Tefnut', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 55: 161–83.
- Westgate, R. (2015) 'Space and Social Complexity in Greece from the Early Iron Age to the Classical Period', *Hesperia* 84: 47–95.
- Whitman, J. (1987) *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique*. Oxford.

- Chaucer, *Speculum* 32: 511–22.
- Willers, D. (1967) 'Zum Hermes Propylaios des Alkamenes,' *Jahrbuch des deutschen archaologischen* 82: 37–109.
- Willet, R. (1965) *Cretan Cults and Festivals*. London.
- Winter, F. (2013) 'A "Greek God" in a Japanese New Religion: On Hermes in Kōfuko-no-Kagaku,' *Numen* 60: 420–46.
- Wirshbo, E. (1982) 'The Mekone Scene in the *Theogony*: Prometheus as Prankster,' *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 23: 101–10.
- Wiseman, T. (1995) *Remus: A Roman Myth*. Cambridge.
- Witt, R. (1971) 'The Guardian Guide and Herald,' in *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*. London, 198–209.
- Wolinski, A. (1987) 'Egyptian Masks: The Priest and His Role,' *Archaeology* 40.1: 22–9.
- Wyler, S. (2006) 'Roman Replications of Greek Arts at the Villa Della Farnesina,' *Art History* 29: 231–2.
- Yates, F. (2002) *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. London.
- Yunis, H. (1996) *Taming Democracy: Models of Political Rhetoric in Classical Athens*. Ithaca, NY.
- Zanetto, G., ed. (1996) *Inni Omerici: testo Greco a fronte*. Milan.
- Zanker, P. (1965) *Wandel der Hermesgestalt in der attischen Vasenmalerei*. Bonn.
- Zanker, P. (1988) *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Ann Arbor, MI.
- Zimmerly, D. (1980) 'The Mercury Series,' *Anthropos* 75: 264–5.
- Zografou, A. (2010) 'Hermès et Hécate. L'espace survolé ou condensé,' in *Chemins d'Hécate: portes, routes, carrefours et autres figures de l'entre-deux*. Liège, 153–201.



INDEX

- Aeneas 122, 127–28, 167, 168–169
 Aeneas Tacitus 91
 Aesop 55, 61, 64, 66n3, 73, 80, 82, 83, 89, 98–100, 112–13
 Aischylos 37n.16, 51n.11, 55, 68n22, 115, 121n19, 173–74
 Aglauros 74, 81–2, 169
agora 6–7, 16, 44, 46, 56, 58, 78, 80, 86n13, 92
 alchemy 157–62, 165, 176, 179
 Alkaios 20n11, 88, 100,
 allegory 146, 149–51, 154, 161
 Anaxagoras 146
 anime 172, 185n9
 animation 170
 Anubis 136–38, 141n26
 Apollodoros 12–13, 18n2, 20n12, 26, 28, 41, 55, 75, 82, 84n4, 84n.8, 88
 Apuleius 9, 126, 140n7, 148, 156, 170, 185n3
 archetype(s) 2n.1, 180; Jungian archetypes 178
 Argos (city) 27, 67n14, 74, 97, 102n11, 130
 Argos Panoptes 7, 12, 93, 111
 Aristophanes 1, 6, 31, 37n.16, 43, 59, 61, 63–4, 78, 91, 97, 102n13
 Arkadia 11–15, 29, 58, 67n13, 74, 82, 188
 Arrian 75
 Asklepios (Asclepius) 13, 134, 159, 171, 182
 astrology (astrological) 151, 153, 161, 166, 178–9
 astronomy 12, 48, 51n9, 148, 151–2, 163n18
 Athens xvi, 4, 7, 14, 16, 26, 42, 49, 58–9, 63–4, 78, 80, 83, 91, 95–6, 110, 156,
 166, 188
 Atlas 11, 33, 103, 160–1, 183
 Augustine 147–8
 Augustus (Octavian) 123–4, 130–2, 139, 140n15, 153
 Aulus Gellius 140n6

Autolykos 26–7, 89

birth charts 152, 154; *genethliology* 152; horoscope 152, 163

Boccaccio 151

Bocchi, Achille 150–1, 163n15

Boiotia 12, 20n13, 26, 61, 75

Botticelli 170, 185n4

caduceus 8, 123, 126–7, 131–2, 134, 137–8, 151, 153, 159, 166–9, 171, 182, 185n3

Caligula 131, 140 n16

Chaucer 149, 154–5, 163n11, 164n23, 165n36

Christian(s) ix, 43, 72, 132, 141n.24, 153–4, 155, 161, 162n2; Christ 150

Cicero 28, 124–5, 134, 139n4, 145, 151, 154

cinema 174, 191; movie(s) 2, 171–5, 183

commentaries, allegorical and mythological 148–9, 154, 162n8

commerce 78–9, 125, 129–30, 132, 139, 140n6, 149–50, 152, 157, 180, 189

Corinth 54, 78, 140n5

cows 7, 11, 25, 28–9, 31, 34, 47, 53, 60, 65, 71, 75, 77, 81–2, 87–8, 90, 95, 99–101, 103–4, 109, 115, 128

creative 25, 28–30, 35, 76, 89, 90, 101, 119, 166, 180; creativity: 23, 25, 28, 101, 170, 180

Crete 5, 14–15, 28, 67n14, 97, 115, 171

Crowley, Aleister 174

curse tablets 83, 101n9

dais 29, 69, 71, 84n4,

Dante 149, 155, 163n11

DC comics 171

Delphi 30, 44, 46, 52n17, 110

dogs (Argos) 67n12, 68n19, 75, 85n9, 95, 136, 139n3 (19n6)

Domitian 123–4, 13, 140n16

dreams 1, 44–5, 51, 52n14, 75, 85n9, 94, 100

Egypt 28, 66n3, 122, 134–5; Egyptian 43, 63, 134–8

Eleusis 26, 55, 174; Eleusinian Mysteries 26, 41, 188

ephebes 64, 68n21, 94

Euhemeras 145, 162n2

Ephesus 133

Etruscan 123, 139

etymology 5, 162n4, 179

Euripides 43–5, 66n3, 91, 94, 110
 exchange 4, 11, 14, 18, 31, 37n11, 58, 60, 69–73, 76–81, 85n10, 86n12, 87, 89, 108, 112, 120n8, 122, 125–6, 128, 147, 172, 182

 Feralia 123–24, 139n3
 Fourth *Homeric Hymn* 12–15, 20n11, n.12, 28, 32, 39, 44, 46–7, 56, 58–60, 65, 69, 74–5, 77, 81, 87–8, 90, 92, 95, 97, 105, 107, 109, 113, 128, 147, 174–5, 177, 187, 189

 Gaul (Roman) 45, 131–3
 Giants 4, 120n10; *Gigantomachy* 4
 Gorgon(s) 55, 110

 Harrison, Tony 173–4, 176
 Hekaté 10, 56, 60, 79, 105, 118, 120n5, 124
 Helios 111, 153, 163n22
 Henryson 155, 164 n25
 herald(s) 1, 4, 8–11, 18, 28, 39–44, 50, 68, 73, 92, 104, 108–9, 114–15, 126, 150, 173, 175, 179 188; (*keryx*) 10, 26, 40–1, 44, 51n2, 55, 109; *heirokeryx* 108
 Herakles 14, 26, 37n16, 43, 45, 48, 63, 65, 73, 103, 110, 117–18, 138
 Hercules 131–2, 146; Disney movie 171, 181, 185n.7
 herm 7–8, 15–16, 18, 19n7 & 8, 31, 55–60, 66n5, 67n11, 68n19, 79, 96, 101n8, 121n20, 124, 145, 176, 188; *herma* 6, 105
 Hermaia: 14m 20n16, 63–4, 68n22, 98
 Hermanubis 136
 Hermaphroditos 97, 154
 Hermathena 124, 139n4, 151
 Hermes, cult titles: *Agoraios* 6, 77–8, 86n13; *Akakêa* 58; *Charidotes* (at Samos) 87; *Dolios* 1, 24–5, 91–2, 140n12; *Einodion* 73; *Enagonios* 1, 63–5, 66n22; *Hegemonios* 1, 4, 63, 68n18; *Katochos* 83; *Kleptes* (on Chios) 87; *Kriophoros* (at Tanagra) 61; *Kyllenios* 6; *Perpheraios* (at Ainos) 57, 101n8; *Promachos* (at Tanagra) 63; *Pronaos* 59; *Propylaios* 59; *Strophaios* 59.
 Hermes, epithets: *Angelos Athanatôn* 39, *Angelos Makarôn* 39, *Argeiphontes* 7, 45, 50, 75, 115; *Chrysorrhapis* 6; *Diaktoros* 7, 115, 171; *Dôter Eaôn* 6; *Empolaios* 1; *Epimêlios* 6, 61; *Eriounês* 6; *Eukolos* 73; *Euskopos* 57; *Hegemonios* 63; *Klepsiphron* 6, 24, 90, 92; *Maiados huios* 6; *Mêchaniôtes* 6; *Poikilomêtês* 90, *Polytropos* 90, *Pulêdokon* 59
 Hermes Trismegistos 134, 138, 145, 157, 160, 164n31, 165n34, 190
Hermitica 145, 158–9, 161, 165n33, 34
 Herodotos 10, 14, 135
 H.D. 176
 Hesiod 3, 7, 10–12, 20n13, 23, 26, 40, 42–3, 49–50, 51n9, 60, 74–5, 81–2, 90, 100, 105–6, 150; Hesiodic 87–8

Hipparchos 7, 19n7, 24, 31, 56, 59
Homer 1, 6–11, 14, 16, 34–5, 40, 42–3, 46, 48, 60–2, 71–2, 89, 94–5, 100, 104–5, 107, 109, 117, 149. 162n3
Homeric Hymns (general) 39, 53, 147, 187; *to Apollo* 37n17, 63, 90, 105; *to Demeter* 41, 117; *to Hermes* 3, 11, 16, 20n11, 24, 39, 44, 47, 53, 88, 101, 128, 175; *see also* *Fourth Homeric Hymn*; *to Hestia* 60, 71; *to Pan* 20n11
Horace 88, 128–30, 140n9, 147, 152, 190

Iberia 140n19

Indo-European 5, 179, 190

initiation 62–3, 68n22, 100, 153, 188

interpreter(s) 44–7, 50, 52n22, 148, 129, 153, 188

Interpretatio Romana 132–3

Iris 40

invisibility 161; cap of 9, 11, 73

Jenkins, Len 175

Joyce, James 175

Judgement of Paris 123

Julian 131, 140 n16, 153, 163n22

Jupiter 123, 125–6, 128, 130, 132–3, 148, 150, 181

Kallimachos 48, 57, 95–6

Kalypso 10, 40

Kato Syme 14, 97

Keats 150

Kerberos 117, 138

kerykion 8–9, 11; Mount Kerykion 12; *see also* wand

Kos 68n22, 82, 105

Kratinos 37n16, 54, 66n2

Lakonian 57

Lares 123–24, 131, 139, 139n3

Late antiquity 61, 147, 149, 155–6, 158, 161

p.213

laughter 30–2, 36, 37n12, 43, 99–100, 102n17, 112, 119, 128, 178, 207

Lectisternium 126, 140n6

Lemura 124

Leto 10, 37n17, 106

Livy 122, 125–6

logos 134, 146, 149; Logos, 141n41; Logios 49, 182

Lucian 41, 43, 50, 54, 59, 64, 97, 111–13

Lug (Lugh) [132](#), [140n19](#)

Lugalbanda [141n.22](#), [179](#)

Lyre [11](#), [24–5](#), [28](#), [30](#), [34](#), [47–8](#), [60](#), [62–3](#), [70–1](#), [73–4](#), [77–8](#)

Magic [10](#), [95–6](#), [117](#), [156–8](#), [161](#), [164n26](#); magician [95](#), [138](#), [189](#)

Maia [6](#), [11–12](#), [20n12](#), [23–5](#), [33–4](#), [37n17](#), [40](#), [90](#), [100](#), [103](#), [116](#), [124–5](#), [131](#), [145](#), [175](#)

Malderelli [148](#)

Mantegna [167](#), [184n2](#)

manga [172](#), [185n9](#)

Marlowe [150](#), [163n11](#)

marriage [80](#), [126](#), [146](#), [162n9](#)

Martianus Capella [148–49](#), [154](#), [162n9](#)

Marvel comics [170](#)

maturation [14](#), [17](#), [62](#), [63–4](#), [189](#)

medieval [2](#), [19n.5](#), [145](#), [150](#), [154](#), [158](#), [161](#), [164n24](#), [164n28](#)

merchants [78](#), [125](#), [129–30](#)

mercury (metal) [157–9](#), [161](#), [171](#), [176](#)

Mercury (planet) [167](#)

Mercury (Roman Hermes) [1](#), [2](#), [123–33](#)

Mêtis (goddess) [23](#), [33](#), [90](#); *mêtis* (quality of mind) [23](#), [25](#), [28](#), [30](#), [35](#)

Mithras [153](#), [163n22](#)

Mnemosyne [34](#), [47](#)

Mycenaean [5](#), [19n3](#), [115](#)

Myrtilos [27](#), [82](#), [86n18](#)

Nebo [133–34](#), [141n22](#)

Neoplatonic philosophy [147](#), [149](#), [158](#)

Nonnos [9](#), [28](#), [39](#), [73](#)

nous [147–8](#)

Nymphs [14](#), [28–9](#), [55](#), [66n2](#), [72](#), [74](#), [110–11](#)

Oaths [26](#), [78](#), [86n12](#), [95](#), [101n9](#)

Odysseus [10](#), [27](#), [40](#), [46](#), [72](#), [95](#), [109](#), [114](#), [146](#), [149–50](#)

Offenbach, Jacques [174](#)

Ôkawa Ryûtô [171–2](#)

Olympians (general) [1–3](#), [11](#), [13](#), [18](#), [33–4](#), [39](#), [43–4](#), [51n4](#), [58](#), [65](#), [69](#), [98](#), [100](#), [104–6](#), [107](#), [119](#), [170–1](#), [173](#)

Olympians gods: Apollo [1](#), [10–11](#), [13](#), [16](#), [24–5](#), [30–1](#), [34–5](#), [37n11](#), [38n20](#), [44–7](#), [50](#), [53](#), [60](#), [62](#), [63–4](#), [73](#), [77–8](#), [81–2](#), [88](#), [90](#), [95](#), [97](#), [99–100](#), [103–6](#), [109–10](#), [112](#), [118](#), [128](#), [133](#), [150](#), [174](#), [179](#) Aphrodite (Venus) [5](#), [13–14](#), [54](#), [62](#), [67n14](#); [74](#), [92](#), [96–7](#), [105](#), [112](#), [116](#), [124](#), [130](#), [141n22](#), [146](#), [154](#), [170](#)

Ares (Mars) [55](#), [62–3](#), [83](#), [97](#), [105–7](#), [112](#), [115](#), [163n22](#), [183](#) Athena

(Minerva) [2](#), [5](#), [13–14](#), [23](#), [36n1](#), [42](#), [50](#), [54–5](#), [58](#), [74](#), [110](#), [124](#), [149](#), [151](#)

Demeter (Ceres) [1](#), [41](#), [118](#) Dionysos (Bacchus) [2](#), [13–14](#), [67n15](#), [71](#), [78](#),

110–11, 116, 120n14, 124, 130 Hades (Dis) 22, 39, 41, 55, 104, 112, 114–
 15, 117, 120n3, 138, 173, 177 Hephaistos (Vulcan) 30, 50, 96, 112, 176
 Hera (Juno) 5, 12, 54, 80, 90, 93, 112, 181 Hestia (Vesta) 20n11, 60, 105,
 180, 188 Poseidon (Neptune) 26, 59, 106, 138 Zeus (Jupiter) 1, 3–4, 7, 9–
 13, 16–18, 23–26, 28, 31, 33–6, 39–45, 47, 49–50, 53–55, 59–60, 69, 72, 74–
 5, 80–1, 83, 90, 98–100, 103–19, 126, 128, 135, 138, 145, 161, 174, 176
 Onchestos 25
 Opera: *Orpheus in the Underworld*, 174; *The Rite of Mercury: A Rock Opera*
 174
 Oracle(s) 11, 44, 46, 57, 63, 78, 92, 98, 105, 156
 orator(s) 28, 48–50, 91, 147, 151, 180; oratory 45, 49, 52n21
 Orpheus 74, 117, 174, 176–7, 181
 Ovid 4, 12, 26, 72, 74, 81, 93, 123–5, 128–32, 147, 162n8
 quicksilver 157, 176
Palatine Anthology 31, 97, 119, 124

 Pan 28, 32, 36n6, 61, 67n14, 122
 Pausanias 12–15, 24, 26–8, 41, 44–5, 51n8, 54, 57–8, 61–3, 66n5, 66n6, 74–6,
 78, 81–2, 88, 91, 96, 110, 118, 138,
 Pelops 14, 41, 81–2, 107
 Peloponnese 5, 14, 26–7, 138
 Persephone 39, 41, 55, 116–18
 Perseus 55, 73–4, 110; in video games 172
 Petronius 129
 Pheneos 67n13
phialê 32, 67n17, 123
 Philostratos 43, 48–9, 61, 73, 88, 99–100, 147
 Pieria 25, 29, 53, 77, 88, 90, 99
 Pindar 63, 65, 68n22,
 Plato 46, 49–50, 62, 64, 79, 90, 99, 146, 153, 177
 Plautus 128

p.214

play(s) 1, 9, 31, 37n16, 43, 45, 51n10, n11, 64, 66n2, n3, 88, 90, 96–8, 101,
 102n15, 115, 126, 149, 173–5
 playful 1, 31, 35, 46, 100, 150, 172
 Pliny (the Elder) 131, 151
 Plutarch 14, 87, 115, 118–19, 123, 138, 146, 156
 Porphyry 88, 153
 Prometheus 3, 11, 17, 24, 30, 33, 35, 49–50, 51n11, 90, 103–4, 119, 161, 174,
 189
 Pseudo-Hyginus 20n12, n16, 26, 28, 50, 55, 73–4, 89, 131
 Psyche 114, 126–7, 148, 159, 179–80

Pythagoras 90, 99

Raleigh 150

reciprocity 70–74, 77, 80–82, 85, 86n16, 129, 189

Renaissance 2, 126, 145, 149, 161, 166, 190

rhetor see orator(s)

Rilke, Rainer Maria 176–77

Rites of Passage 62, 65, 189; *see also* initiation

Rome 2, 28, 63, 122–24, 126–28, 132–3, 137, 140n5, 161, 172, 185n3

Rosmerta 133, 140n19

Rubens, Peter Paul 169

sacrifice 14, 26, 31, 44, 50, 58–9, 65, 66n8, 71–2, 75, 82, 84n4, 89, 108, 115,
119 & n1, 179, 187, 188

Samos 14, 87,

Samothrace 28, 79; Samothracian Mysteries 7, 67n14, 79, 86n14, 96

Sandys, George 150

Santayana, George 177–8

sceptre 20n9, 41, 51n7, 73, 107, 112, 133; *skeptron* 51n7

Seneca the Younger 146, 153

Serres, Michel 177, 185n16, 190

Servius 148, 153

Shakespeare 150

Shelley, Percy Bysshe 175, 185n13

Sicily 16, 59

Silvestris, Bernardus 149

sleep 43, 45, 93–5, 168

Sophokles 37n.16, 55, 66n3, 88, 91, 105, 115

Sokrates 46, 49, 146, 156, 162n4, 162n.8

Sparta 57n20, 62, 65, 78, 100

Spencer 150, 163n14

Stoic 146, 153; Stoics 162n5, 190

Strabo 36n7, 58, 124

Styx 37n14, 138

Suda, the 149

Tacitus 91, 132

Tanagra 12, 51n.1, 61, 63, 67n17, 114

Thebes (Greek) 5, 51n1, 71, 114; (Egyptian) 135

Theokritos 28, 57

Theophrastos 66n4, 109

therapon 109–10,

Theoxenia 11, 72, 84n4, 126

Titan(s) 1, 11, 33, 35, 90, 103, 106, 171

Thoth (Thut) 134–6, 138

Trickster [24](#), [36n1](#), [89–91](#), [96–98](#), [100–02](#)

Turms [123](#), [139](#)

underworld [11](#), [31](#), [35](#), [37n14](#), [41](#), [45](#), [51n4](#), [54](#), [104](#), [112](#), [114–18](#), [121](#), [123](#),
[136–39](#), [156–7](#), [174](#), [176](#)

Vernant, J-P. [36n1](#), [60](#), [86n15](#), [120n5](#), [180](#), [188](#)

video games [172](#), [173](#), [185n10](#)

Virgil [12](#), [122](#), [127](#), [147](#),

wand [6](#), [8](#), [81–2](#), [94–5](#), [101n6](#), [113](#), [115](#), [127](#), [155](#), [168](#), [182](#)

whips [62](#), [67n15](#)

winged sandals [9](#), [11](#), [30](#), [47](#), [73](#), [127](#), [167](#), [17](#); *pedila* [9](#)

wings [9](#), [126](#), [149](#), [159](#), [168](#), [171–2](#), [176](#), [181](#), [183](#), [184n2](#)

wit [30](#), [36](#), [104](#), [180](#)

Woden (Odin) [132](#), [140n18](#)

xenia [52n18](#), [73](#), [86n12](#), [125](#),

Zucchi, Joseph [150](#)